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New Light on Early Cambodian Buddhism

Our understanding of early Cambodian Buddhism is based on information gathered from two primary sources. These include the ancient textual materials as well as the artistic evidence itself. Of concern is the extent to which scholars have relied on Chinese texts and indigenous inscriptions with little appreciation for Buddhist imagery except as a “visual aid” in support of what has been already learned from the written texts. Such an approach is unnecessarily limiting, resulting not from a lack of sources, but from scholarly preconceptions and interests that ignore the richness of information “written” in the art which surely demands the same kind of serious attention as is devoted to the written word.

This paper aims to shed new light on early Cambodian Buddhism by studying images of Buddha, mainly from Angkor Borei, an ancient walled city in the Mekong delta that occupied a pre-eminent position in reputedly the most important kingdom in early Southeast Asia called Funan by third-century Chinese.¹ All of these images except for one are now housed in the National Museum of Cambodia in Phnom Penh where I recently catalogued Angkor Borei stone

sculpture. Table 1 lists 64 pre-ninth-century images or portions thereof of which 43 can be identified as either Buddhist or Hindu. Of these 43 images, 17 or 40 per cent are Buddhist of which nine are sufficiently complete for study with additional insights supplied by three other related images from the neighboring province of Kompong Speu.

In this study, I begin with a stylistic analysis of the 12 images of Buddha. Then I make a morphological analysis to quantify differences in their body forms by taking measurements directly from the images. I then establish relative dates based on two datable patterns and a comparative analysis of other early Southeast Asian images. I conclude that early Cambodian Buddhism is a short-lived phenomenon in Angkor Borei. Artistic evidence supports the existence of at least two different schools. These conclusions are lastly viewed in light of what we already know from written documents. Only when we combine what is observable in the Buddhist imagery with the information gathered from textual materials can early Cambodian Buddhism be properly interpreted.

Stylistic Analysis

These 12 images of Buddha can be chronologically ordered on the basis of subtle variations in style. This stylistic analysis rests on what many French scholars have already noted namely that early Cambodian sculpture initially displayed a highly-stylized naturalism that evolved over time toward a more abstract form.² A practical and informative way to describe this stylistic evolution is to divide the images into separate groups in an effort to elucidate the stylistic transformation of the relatively homogeneous images.

Group #1

Group #1 includes four images of Buddha. These are deemed earliest based on a variety of stylistic features traceable to South Asian prototypes from which early Cambodian Buddhist imagery is ultimately derived. Of importance is that these earliest images are never copied from any given style, but rather represent a harmonious synthesis of artistic traditions from North and South India or Sri Lanka in which an emphasis is placed on the subtle modeling of a naturalistic body form.

The first in this group is the Wat Romlok standing Buddha (Figure 1). This image is posed in a hip-swayed stance with left leg slightly bent. Its subtle movement as well as a clinging robe and slender body are significant features of the late fifth-century Sarnath style while large, flattened curls and a barely visible cranial protuberance (*uṣṇīṣa*) as well as two open lotus flowers are characteristics of South Indian or Sri Lankan art.

The Wat Romlok image has a long oval face. Separately arched eyebrows frame almond-shaped eyes highlighted by tear ducts. Below a broken nose is a thin upper lip turned up in slight smile. Flattened, distended earlobes extend to above the chin.

A transparent robe in closed-mode covers both shoulders and closely molds his slender body. The robe hangs down lower behind than in front. Griswold states that "[t]his feature is not to be taken literally, for it would be needlessly untidy and in violation of the Vinaya rules. It is simply a matter of *anamorphosis*, a convention by which Indian art may shift our

point of view for a single detail so as to allow us to see it better."³ This "single detail" is the under cloth (*antaravāsaka*) and pleated at the bottom held up by a belt below the waist. Below the robe are realistically modeled feet standing on two open lotus flowers. The heels and ankles remain attached to the stone block.

The second image is the Wat Romlok Buddha head (Figure 2). Pierre Dupont places the image in the Amaravati school of Andhra Pradesh or the Anuradhapura school of Sri Lanka.⁴ Mireille Benisti argues that the Buddha head has ties to Gupta sculpture and cites as a prototype the celebrated Buddha of Sarnath.⁵ Most likely, this head represents, rather synthesis of both schools or styles.

Large, flattened curls in alternating rows cover the head and a barely visible *uṣṇīṣa*. These curls, contrary to tradition, turn in both a clockwise and counterclockwise direction (Figure 3). Separately arched eyebrows flow into the bridge of a damaged nose and highlight downcast eyes. A cleft passes between the nose and a thin upper lip, edged and turned up in slight smile. Below the fleshy lower lip is a prominent chin. Chin-length distended earlobes hug a massive neck.

The third image is the Wat Romlok seated Buddha (Figure 4). This image has no head, making it difficult to stylistically classify him. However, the naturalistic modeling of his torso and legs clearly derive from an Indian artistic tradition which accounts for his placement in Group #1.

In this case, the Buddha is seated on a damaged base in a half-lotus position (*vīrāsana*) with hands posed in meditation (*dhyāna mudrā*) (Figure 4). He has broad shoulders, heavy biceps and thin forearms. A transparent robe in open-mode leaves the right shoulder and arm bare, making a s-shaped dip below the right pectoral. His slender torso has a slightly fleshy abdomen limited by an incised line denoting his under cloth and sharply cutting the image. The legs are naturalistically conceived with gently swelling thighs and knees. An incised line above each ankle marks the robe edge.

The fourth image of the group is the Wat Kos seated Buddha with hair curls, *uṣṇīṣa*, eyebrows and earlobes stylistic similar to Figures 1 and 2 (Figure 5).

In this case, the Buddha is seated in *virasana* with hands posed in *dhyaṇa mudrā*. Large, flattened curls in alternating rows cover the head and a barely visible *uṣṇīṣa*. These curls, contrary to tradition, turn in both a clockwise and counterclockwise direction as already noted above for Figure 2. Separately arched eyebrows frame almond-shaped eyes with tear ducts, irises and pupils skillfully indicated. Below a large triangular-shaped nose is a thin upper lip turned up in slight smile. A fleshy lower lip, a prominent chin and short distended earlobes complete the facial features.

This image has noticeably broad shoulders and heavy arms. A transparent robe in open-mode leaves the right shoulder and arm bare. His slender torso has a slightly fleshy abdomen limited by an incised line denoting the under cloth and sharply cutting the image. The legs are simply conceived with large flattened feet positioned on an undecorated base.

Group #2

Group #2 includes the Wat Romlok standing image of Buddha (Figure 6). It is deemed stylistically later because of an abrupt change in his *uṣṇīṣa*. However, the shape of his abraded eyebrows raises uncertainty over the classification. If his eyebrows were separately arched as is characteristic of Group #1 images, then this image could be in a separate group. On the other hand, if his eyebrows were wing-shaped, then the image belongs in Group #3.

The Wat Romlok standing image of Buddha is posed in subtle movement. His head tilts downward to the right; his right shoulder is marginally lower than his left; the weight of his body rests on his right leg while his left is flexed and turns slightly. This pose recalls a Buddha on the exterior walls of Ajanta Cave 19 in which the image extends his right hand towards a small boy.⁶

Large, flattened curls in alternating rows cover his head with the sudden appearance of a prominent *uṣṇīṣa* marked by a bun-like curl or twist on top (Figure 7). His broadly oval face has downcast eyes with no indication of irises or pupils. A thin upper lip turns up in slight smile. Below the fleshy lower lip is a prominent chin. Distended earlobes, shy of the shoulders, hug a massive neck.

A transparent robe in open-mode leaves the right shoulder and arm bare. The robe extends down and around the right leg curving upward at mid-calf to the left arm. A damaged left side makes it impossible to say whether the robe originally passed over or wrapped around the wrist. A heavier torso has a slightly fleshy abdomen limited by an incised line denoting the under cloth and sharply cutting the image. Also visible are contours for the upper legs and groin. Hanging below the robe is a smooth under cloth pleated on the sides and attached to the ankles with the matrix of the stone block greater on the left.

Group #3

Group #3 includes two Angkor Borei images: the Wat Tuol Lean standing image of Buddha and the Wat Tuol Chan head. These images are classified in this group because of what appears to be the first use of wing-shaped eyebrows. These are adopted in combination with a prominent *uṣṇīṣa* marked by a bun-like curl or twist on top. But, as already noted above, if the image in Figure 6 of Group #2 has wing-shaped eyebrows, then the image also belongs in this group.

The Wat Tuol Lean standing image of Buddha stands in rigidly posed on a lotus base (Figure 8). Large, flattened curls in alternating rows cross the brow in a straight line. They cover the head and a prominent *uṣṇīṣa* marked by a bun-like curl or twist on top. A broadly oval face has wing-shaped eyebrows that highlight almond-shaped eyes with tear ducts, irises and pupils skillfully indicated. A cleft passes between the damaged nose and a thin upper lip, edged and turned up in slight smile. Below the fleshy lower lip is a prominent chin. Distended earlobes, shy of the shoulders, hug a massive neck.

A transparent robe in open-mode is visible in spite of damage. The robe leaves the right shoulder and arm bare. It then passes down and around the right leg curving upward at mid-calf to the left arm. A damaged left side makes it impossible to know whether the robe originally passed over or wrapped around the wrist. Hanging below is a smooth under cloth pleated on the sides. It is attached to the ankles and base with the matrix of the stone block greater on the

left side. A broken support appears on the right that previously supported a hand.

An open lotus flower decorates the base. The lotus is equally divided into two sections: an alternating sequence of large and small tapering petals above an alternating sequence of large and small heart-shaped segments of calyx leaves. This floral motif first appears in early Cambodian art between A.D. 617 and 637.⁷ The Sambor Prei Kuk lintel from the outskirts of S7 is a finely preserved example from the early seventh-century (Figure 9). This lintel has a polylobed arch decorated with vegetal patterns and three medallions with the central one depicting Indra astride his elephant Airāvata positioned on this lotus base. Directly below each medallion, the same open lotus flower hangs upside down from a jeweled pendant.

The second image is the Wat Tuol Chan Buddha head (Figure 10). There is a striking resemblance between this head and that at Wat Tuol Lean. The similarities include large, flattened curls in alternating rows, a broadly oval face, wing-shaped eyebrows, almond-shaped eyes with tear ducts, irises and pupils skillfully indicated, a thin upper lip, edged and turned up in slight smile, and distended earlobes, shy of the shoulders.

From Kompong Speu, located northwest of Angkor Borei, come three other images of Buddha stylistically related to both the Wat Tuol Lean image of Buddha and the Wat Tuol Chan head.

The Phum Thmei image of Buddha is seated in *vīrasāna* with hands posed in *dhyāna mudrā* (Figure 11). Large, flattened curls in alternating rows cross the brow in a straight line. They cover the head and a prominent *uṣṇīṣa* marked by a bun-like curl or twist on top. Winged-shaped eyebrows highlight almond-shaped eyes with tear ducts, irises, and pupils skillfully indicated. A large triangular-shaped nose has been restored in the nostril area. A cleft appears to pass between the nose and a thin upper lip turned up in slight smile. Below the short and fleshy lower lip is a prominent chin. Distended earlobes hug a massive neck and touch the shoulders.

A transparent robe in open-mode leaves the right shoulder and arm bare, making an s-shaped

dip below the right pectoral. Its slender torso has a soft and fleshy abdomen limited by a depression denoting the under cloth and sharply molding the image. The robe itself falls in folds off the left wrist onto the thigh of broadly splayed legs marked by raised lines to indicate both robe and under cloth.

Of special interest is the decorated base. Beneath an open lotus flower with a central petal is a jeweled band pattern characterized by alternating oval and rectangular forms with each form duplicated within itself. Bénisti has convincingly demonstrated that this jewel band pattern is datable between the mid-seventh century and the second decade of the eighth century in Cambodia.⁸

The Tuol Ta Hoy image of Buddha stands in a hip-swayed pose on a lotus base identical to the Tuol Lean one (Figure 12).⁹ Large, flattened curls in alternating rows cover the head and a prominent *uṣṇīṣa* marked by a bun-like curl or twist on top. Wing-shaped eyebrows dip above downcast eyes with no indication of irises or pupils. A cleft passes between the nose and a thin upper lip edged and turned in slight smile. Below a fleshy lower lip is a prominent chin. Distended earlobes, shy of the shoulders, hug a massive neck.

A transparent robe in open-mode leaves the right shoulder and arm bare. The robe passes down around the right leg curving upward at mid-calf to the left arm. Beneath the robe is a fleshy abdomen limited by an incised line denoting the under cloth and sharply cutting the image. Also visible are contours for the upper legs and groin as already noted above in Figure 6. Hanging below the robe is a smooth under cloth pleated on the sides and attached to the base between the ankles.

The Tuol Preah Theat image of Buddha stands in rigid pose on a plain base (Figure 13). Large, flattened curls in alternating rows cover the head and a prominent *uṣṇīṣa* marked by a bun-like curl or twist on top. Winged-shaped eyebrows highlight almond-shaped eyes with tear ducts, irises, and pupils skillfully indicated. A cleft passes between a large nose with slightly splayed nostrils and a thin upper lip, edged and turned up in slight smile. A fleshy lower lip, a prominent chin, and short distended earlobes complete the facial picture.

A transparent robe in closed-mode covers both shoulders, hanging down lower behind than in front. Although the left hand is damaged, the arrangement of the drapery over the forearm makes it possible to say that the image never held the end of the robe in the hand. A slender torso has a soft and fleshy abdomen limited by a depression denoting the under cloth and sharply molding the image. The right hand is raised and performs a gesture of argumentation (*vitarka mudrā*). However, the slightly different height and angle of the left arm suggest that the left hand is differently posed. Hanging below the robe is a perfectly smooth under cloth pleated on the sides. It is attached to the ankles and base, similar to the technique already noted above in Figure 1.

Group #4

Group #4 includes two images of Buddha: the Wat Kompong Luang seated image and the Parinirvana Buddha. These images are classified as belonging to a later period because of a change in the treatment of curls.

The Wat Kompong Luang Buddha is seated in *vīrasāna* with his right hand performing a gesture of reassurance (*abhaya mudrā*) and his left in *dhyaṇa mudrā* (Figure 14). Large, flattened curls in aligned rows are painted black. They cross the brow in a straight line covering the front of the head and the base of the *uṣṇīṣa* from which a later flame-like finial emanates. The back of his head has no curls and is also painted black (Figure 15). I know of no other early Cambodian image of Buddha with a similar absence of curls. A rare Southeast Asian example is a Dvaravati standing image of Buddha from northeast Thailand, dated to the eighth century. Hiram Woodward suggests that perhaps "there was a fitted gold cover on which the curls were formed in relief, such as is known from much later times."¹⁰

Despite heavy lacquering and gilding which obscure the object, his eyebrows apparently are wing-shaped. The ridged upper eyelids highlight almond-shaped eyes with irises and pupils that are skillfully painted. The nostril area of a large triangular-shaped nose has been restored. A thin upper lip turns up in slight smile. Below a fleshy lower lip is a prominent chin. Chin-length distended earlobes hug a massive neck.

The image has broad shoulders, heavy arms and a large, restored right hand. A transparent robe in open-mode leaves the right shoulder and arm bare. The robe then makes a s-shaped dip below the right pectoral, molding a heavy torso marked by a crack in the middle. Beneath the robe is a fleshy abdomen limited by an incised line denoting the under cloth and sharply cutting the image. Also visible are the contours of the upper legs and hipbones as already noted above for Figures 6 and 12. The robe and under cloth are indicated by raised lines on the splayed legs that rest upon a base encased in a wooden frame. The right foot is flattened on the left leg with the left foot protruding beneath the right.

The second image in the group is the Parinirvāṇa Buddha (Figure 16). Dredged from the water channel that bisects Angkor Borei, the face of this reclining image is seriously water damaged. The arms and legs below his knees have been lost and just the bed or platform remain.

The Parinirvāṇa Buddha image reclines on its right side with the right hand beneath his head. Large, flattened curls in aligned rows cross the brow in a straight line. They cover the head and a prominent *uṣṇīṣa* marked by a bun-like curl or twist on top. Wear from being submerged makes it impossible to distinguish the eyebrows and eyes. Below the broad nose is a thin upper lip turned up in slight smile. The fleshy lower lip protrudes above a prominent chin. Distended earlobes, shy of the shoulders, hug a massive neck.

A transparent robe in open-mode leaves the right shoulder and arm bare, making an s-shaped dip below the right pectoral. The heavy torso has a fleshy abdomen limited by an incised line denoting the under cloth and sharply cutting the image. Also visible are the contours of the upper legs and groin area as already noted above for Figures 6, 12 and 14. On the rear are two swelling buttocks and a separation between the legs.

The Morphological Analysis

In this morphological analysis, we concentrate on the quantification of form. Measuring form enriches what we see with our eyes by providing a more objective data base. By comparing the

measure of one form with another changes in form can be qualified.

The main objective of the morphological analysis is to identify the system of construction used by the early Cambodian sculptor. This can be determined by taking measurements directly from the images themselves. These were then assessed with references in ancient texts concerning proper proportions or iconometry. Because, however, there are no such early Cambodian works, we must rely on texts from elsewhere in the Indic world.¹¹ An important recent work on early Indian sculpture also consulted is by John Mosteller.¹² I first review standing and then seated images with vertical measurements considered before measurements of width.

The standing images include those in Figure 1 from Group #1 and Figure 6 from Group #2 or #3.¹³ A central vertical axis is divided into equal units from which horizontal lines are drawn (Figures 1a, 6a). Each unit is referred to as a module and equals the height of the face measured from *hairline to chin tip*. In the case of Figures 1 and 6, both make use of a nine-modular system meaning that their central vertical axis is divided into nine equal parts.

This nine-module system is then rearranged into three vertical units. These units include 1: the head from *uṣṇīṣa* to neck; 2: the torso from neck to groin; 3: the legs from groin to soles of feet. The torso or middle unit is always three modules in length while the upper and lower units vary in proportion by shifting fractions of module units above and below the torso. In the case of Figure 1, the torso is measured from *the raised neckline of the robe* with the upper unit equal to $1 \frac{2}{3}$ modules and the lower $4 \frac{1}{3}$. As for Figure 6, the torso is measured higher up from the *midpoint of the neck* with the upper unit increased to 2 and the lower decreased to 4. Altogether these proportional changes in Figure 6 increase the length of torso and upper unit, resulting in a foreshortened lower body.

The vertical measurements are then supplemented by measurements of width. These measurements are determined by drawing two parallel lines at a distance of one module from the central vertical axis onto which two intersecting isosceles triangles are positioned. The chin horizontal forms the base of the first

triangle with an apex centered on the axis at the groin. The groin horizontal forms the base of the second triangle with an apex centered on the axis at the chin. Chin width defines shoulder breadth; the intersection of the two isosceles triangles identifies the midpoint between the chin and genitals from which a circumscribed circle specifies shoulder contour; and genital width fixes the extent of the right hip and left foot.

Other width measurements are determined by horizontally transposing some of the vertical measurements. In the case of the Figure 1 image, the vertical measurement from *hairline to neckline* equals heart width while the vertical measurement from *hairline to chin* is equal to midpoint of torso width. In the same way, the vertical measurement from *midpoint of neck to heart* equals navel width while groin width is equal to the vertical measurement of *chin to midpoint of torso*. As for the Figure 6 image, the vertical measurements are quite different. While the vertical measurement from *hairline to neckline* remains equal to heart width, the vertical measurement of *hairline to midpoint of neck* is now equal to midpoint of torso width. In the same way, the vertical measurement from *midpoint of neck to midpoint of torso* equals navel width while groin width is equal to the vertical measurement from *neckline to navel*. Altogether these proportional changes in the Figure 6 image increase nearly all of the width measurements, resulting in a heavier torso with the implication that standing images become heavier in body form over time.

Let us now consider the seated images.

The vertical measurements for Figure 4 and 5 from Group #1, Figure 11 from Group #3, and Figure 14 from Group #4 indicate the use of a different modular system. Except for Figure 5,¹⁴ the images conform to a five-modular system with a lengthened module measured from *the hairline to chin base* (Figures 4a, 11a, 14a). This change similarly affects the three vertical units. The torso is measured from *midpoint of the neck to groin* while the upper and lower units are inversely related with measurements approximately equal to $1 \frac{1}{3}$ and $\frac{2}{3}$ modules respectively.

Another vertical measurement is defined by lap breadth. When vertically transposed, this

distance defines three proportional variations. For Figure 4, lap breadth equals the distance from lower foot to nose. For the Figure 11 images, this measurement reaches the eyebrows while for Figure 14 it extends to the hairline. Altogether these proportional changes indicate that seated images take on an increasingly squat body form over time.

The vertical measurements are supplemented by measurements of width. These measurements are first generated by drawing two parallel lines at a distance of one module from the central vertical axis onto which two intersecting isosceles triangles are positioned. The chin horizontal forms the base of the first triangle with an apex centered on the axis at the groin is horizontal forms the base of the second triangle with an apex centered on the axis at the chin. The width of the raised neckline horizontal defines shoulder breadth; the intersection of the two isosceles triangles identifies the midpoint between the chin and groin from which a circumscribed circle specifies shoulder contour; and the width of the groin horizontal fixes the raised lines for the drapery over left and right legs.

Other width measurements are defined by horizontally transposing some of the vertical measurements. Little can be said for the image in Figure 4 because of its missing head, but in the case of the Figure 11 image, all vertical measurements start from the hairline. The vertical measurement of *hairline to neckline* equals heart and navel width while *hairline to midpoint of neck* is equal to midpoint of torso width. As for the Figure 14 image, all vertical measurements start from the *uṣṇīṣa*. The vertical measurement of *uṣṇīṣa to midpoint of neck* equals heart and navel width while *uṣṇīṣa to chin* equals midpoint width. Altogether these proportional changes in the Figure 14 image increase all of the width measurements, indicating that seated images become heavier in torso in combination with the appearance of a more squat body form that accentuates over time.

One final point deserves special attention. Highly significant is that the proportional changes for standing and seated images coincide with variations in style. A comparison of images in Figures 1 and 6 indicates that the standing images have a heavier torso and a foreshortened

lower body together with a prominent *uṣṇīṣa* marked by a bun-like curl or twist on top and sometimes, wing-shaped eyebrows. Similarly, a comparison of images in Figures 4, 11 and 14 indicates that the seated images become heavier and more squat over time. An early change in the evolutionary process is the appearance of a prominent *uṣṇīṣa* marked by a bun-like curl or twist on top in combination with wing-shaped eyebrows, as shown in Figure 11. A later treatment of curls is shown in Figure 14.

The Chronology

Of the nine Angkor Borei images, those in Group #3 are readily dated because of two datable motifs: the open lotus flower and the jeweled band pattern. Their simultaneous use indicates that Group #3 dates to after A.D. 617 and before the eighth century. A mid-seventh-century date is a logical conclusion given the popularity of the jeweled band pattern at that time.

The other images can be dated from information gathered from the stylistic and morphological analysis. Major stylistic and morphological differences set apart Group #1 from #2 while minor differences separate the latter three. This indicates two distinct sets: the first comprises Group #1; the second Group #2, #3 and #4.

The second set can be dated by starting with the mid-seventh-century date for Group #3. Group #2 slightly precedes the mid-seventh century, and Group #4 comes slightly later. But how many years is "slightly"? A conservative estimate would be less than one generation. Based on this, a sequence of relative dates is elaborated in Table 2.¹⁵

The first set is more difficult to date because of an absence of datable motifs. This problem is partially solved by comparing Group #1 to the earliest images of Buddha found elsewhere in Southeast Asia. These images are imports or copies from South India or Sri Lanka. These images have been recently dated by Ulrich von Schroeder as between the sixth and seventh century.¹⁶ The earliest Cambodian images of Buddha are, however, neither imports nor copies, but rather adaptations of Indian prototypes. This infers a stylistically later date for Group #1 than the sixth century.

A high-relief image of Kṛṣṇa Govardhana (Figure 17) from Wat Koh, eight kilometers from Angkor Borei, argues for an early seventh-century date for the first set of images. Dupont states that the boy-god is conceivably the earliest Cambodian image of a male Hindu deity.¹⁷ I have dated the image to about the third decade of the seventh century based on a stylistic analysis of other images of Viṣṇu from Angkor Borei.¹⁸ Of importance is that some of Kṛṣṇa's facial features are stylistically similar to those of the images in Figure 1. These include separately arched eyebrows, almond-shaped eyes and short distended earlobes. Others features recall those of the stylistically later Figure 6 images. These include large, raised head curls with a bun-like curl or twist on top of a cranial protuberance. Altogether the artistic evidence demonstrates that Group #1 is stylistically earlier than the third decade of the seventh century. A conservative estimate for the date of Group #1 would be sometime between the first and third decade of the seventh century.

Conclusions

The artistic evidence indicates that the early images of Buddha were produced for only a short period of the time at Angkor Borei. The earliest probably date to the early seventh century while the latest can be dated to the sixth to seventh decade of the seventh century. This terminal date is highly significant in light of what the Chinese Buddhist monk I-ching had to say about religion in early Cambodia. He stated that Hinduism seemingly preceded Buddhism, but later, in the early sixth century (?), Buddhism had begun to flourish after which the brotherhood was expelled and exterminated by a wicked king.¹⁹ This implies that Buddhism had expired by the time I-ching wrote his commentary between A. D. 683 to 692.

Many Southeast Asian scholars have advanced names for the "wicked king." George Coedès supported Bhavavarman or Mahendrarvarman, who reigned in the second half of the sixth century.²⁰ Lawrence Briggs put forward the name of Īśnāvarman, who reigned in Sambor Prei Kuk between A.D. 617 to 637.²¹ Pierre Dupont identified Jayavarman I, who reigned between A.D. 657 to 681 and left several

inscriptions in the environs of Angkor Borei.²² The artistic evidence, however, together with I-ching report indicate that Jayavarman I is the only candidate for "wicked king".

These early images of Buddha indicate the existence of at least two Buddhist schools (*nikāya*) in Angkor Borei. I-ching states that in India and the islands of the Southern Sea, "people speak of the four Nikāyas."²³ He then goes on to claim that "[t]he distinction of the four Nikāyas (schools) is shown by the differences of wearing the Nivāsana (i.e. undergarment)."²⁴

The Angkor Borei images of Buddha show these differences. The earliest Wat Romlok image wears an under cloth upheld by a belt in plain view below the waist and pleated on either side of the ankles (Figure 1). Based on I-ching's account, it seems this follows the rules laid down by the Mūlasarvāstivādanikāya, a Buddhist school that used Sanskrit for its canonical language.²⁵ It is noteworthy that no other Angkor Borei image of Buddha wears this style of under cloth. All others wear an under cloth without a belt. The upper hem on this image is twisted on itself to make it tight with the selvage turned out. This method of wearing the under cloth is made visible by an incised line below the navel and pleats on either side of the ankles. I-ching's account indicates that this style follows the rules laid down by the Sammitinikāya or Sthaviranikāya.²⁶ The Sammitinikāya is more likely because the under cloth recalls those worn by the Gupta images of Buddha from Sarnath whose sectarian affiliation is implied by a Gupta period inscription engraved prominently on the shaft of the great Maurya Lion Column in praise of the Sammitinikāya.²⁷

Before we leave this topic of *nikāya*, let us reconsider the Phum Thmei image of Buddha, (Figure 11) from Kompong Speu. No incised line is marked below the navel. Instead, we see a fleshy abdomen limited by a depression that marks the under cloth. I take this to mean that the upper hem has been twisted in on itself to make it tight with the selvage turned in. This method of putting on the under cloth may be in accordance with the Sthaviranikāya because the under cloth recalls those worn by seated images of Buddha from the late Amarāvati school of Āndhra Pradesh dated to somewhere between

the fifth to sixth century and the late Anurādhapura school of Sri Lanka dated at the earliest to the mid-sixth century.²⁸ I-ching states that in the late seventh century “ [t]owards the South (India), all follow the Sthaviranikāya, though there exist a few adherents of the other Nikāyas.”²⁹ He goes on to say that “[i]n the Simhala island (Ceylon) all belong to the Āryasthviranikāya, and the Āryamahāsaṅghikanikāya is rejected.”³⁰

One final comment follows. The Tuol Preah Theat image of Buddha from Kompong Speu displays a similar method for putting on the under cloth (Figure 13). As already noted, this image offers rare proof of Theravāda Buddhism. On its back is a Pali inscription (K. 820) of the Buddhist creed.

The Angkor Borei images of Buddha indicate that after the late seventh century, there is a hiatus of nearly 400 years before Buddhist

imagery re-appears in the late twelfth to thirteenth century. Elsewhere in Cambodia, this is not the case with inscriptions testifying to the practice of Buddhism in the eighth century. The Anlun Pran inscription (K. 132) from Kratie, dated to śaka 629 (A.D. 708), commemorates the installation of a female deity, believed to be Prajñāpāramitā, the Mahāyāna Buddhist goddess of perfect wisdom.³¹ The Prasat Ta Keam inscription (K. 244) from Siem Reap, dated to śaka 713 (A.D. 791), praises a celebrated image of Avalokiteśvara, a Mahāyāna Buddhist *bodhisattva*.³² This evidence tempts me to speculate about I-ching’s testimony. When the Chinese Buddhist monk spoke about the demise of Buddhism in Cambodia, did he mean the demise of Buddhism in Angkor Borei? If this is so, then is it possible that Angkor Borei is Cambodia in I-ching’s mind?



Notes

¹ George Coedès, *The Indianized States of Southeast Asia*, trans. Susan Brown Cowing, ed. Walter F. Vella (Honolulu: The University of Hawaii Press, 1968): 36–38.

² Philippe Stern, “Le style du Kulen,” *Bulletin de l’École française d’Extrême-Orient* 43 (1943): 111–149. Gilberte de Coral-Remusat, *L’Art khmer. Les grandes étapes de son évolution*. 2d ed. (Paris: Études d’art et d’ethnologie asiatiques, 1951). Pierre Dupont, *La Statuaire préangkorienne* (Ascona: Artibus Asiae, 1955). Jean Boisselier, *La Statuaire khmère et son évolution* (Saigon: École française d’Extrême-Orient, 1955).

³ A. B. Griswold, “Imported Images and the Nature of Copying in the Art of Siam,” *Essays Offered to G.H. Luce*, ed. Ba Shin, Jean Boisselier, and A. B. Griswold, vol. 2 (Ascona: Artibus Asiae, 1966): 61–62.

⁴ Pierre Dupont, *La Statuaire préangkorienne* (Ascona: Artibus Asiae, 1955): 196.

⁵ Mireille Bénisti, “Une sculpture khmère inédite,” *Arts Asiatiques* 36 (1981): 64.

⁶ Susan L. Huntington, *The Art of Ancient India* (New York: Weatherhill, 1985): 244.

⁷ Nancy Dowling, “A New Date for the Phnom Da Images and Its Implications for Early Cambodia,” *Asian Perspectives* 38 (1999): 51–61.

⁸ Mireille Bénisti, “Recherches sur le premier art

khmer. II. ‘La bande à chatons,’ critère chronologique?” *Arts Asiatiques* 20 (1969): 99–120.

Mireille Bénisti, *Rapports entre le premier art khmer et l’art indien*, 2 vols. (Paris: École française d’Extrême-Orient, 1970): 54–55.

⁹ Jean Boisselier, “Le Buddha de Tuol-Ta-Hoy et l’art bouddhique du Sud Est Asiatique,” *Annales de l’Université Royale des Beaux-Arts* 1(1967): 121–138. This article provides additional insights into the stylistic origin of the Tuol Ta Hoy Buddha and the propagation of Buddhism in early Southeast Asia.

¹⁰ Hiram W. Woodward Jr., *The Sacred Sculpture of Thailand* (Baltimore: The Walters Art Gallery, 1997): 62.

¹¹ These texts include: M. Ramakrishna Bhat, *Brhatsamhitā* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1981): chapter 58 and Gega Lama, *Principles of Tibetan Art* (Jamyang Singe: W.B. Darjeeling, 1983).

¹² John F. Mosteller, *The Measure of Form: A New Approach for the Study of Indian Sculpture* (New Delhi: Abinav, 1991).

¹³ The image in figure 9 is omitted because of serious damage to its front that makes it impossible to measure the image.

¹⁴ Figure 5 deviates from a five-module system because of disproportionate legs. Boisselier alludes to such proportional problems when he states that this image is “mediocre from every point of view.”

Jean Boisselier, *Manuel d'archéologie d'Extrême-Orient*. Part 1, *Asie du Sud-Est. Le Cambodge*. (Paris: A. et J. Picard, 1966): 268.

¹⁵ A generation is 20 years. Less than one generation is about 10 to 15 years.

¹⁶ Ulrich von Schroeder, *Buddhist Sculptures of Sri Lanka* (Hong Kong: Visual Dharma Publications, 1990): 175–179.

¹⁷ Dupont 26–27.

¹⁸ Nancy Dowling, “A New Date for the Phnom Da Images,” Paper given at the National Gallery of Art, September 25, 1997.

¹⁹ I-Tsing, *A Record of the Buddhist Religion as Practised in India and the Malay Archipelago* (A.D. 671–695), trans. J. Takakusu (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1896): 12.

²⁰ George Cœdès, *The Indianized States of Southeast Asia* 68.

²¹ Lawrence Briggs, *The Ancient Khmer Empire* (Philadelphia, 1951): 51.

²² Dupont 54.

²³ I-tsing 8.

²⁴ I-tsing 66.

²⁵ I-tsing 66.

²⁶ I-tsing 66–67.

²⁷ Daya Ram Sahni, *Catalogue of the Museum of Archaeology at Sarnath* (Delhi: Indological Book House, 1972): 30–31.

²⁸ Von Schroeder 104–207.

²⁹ I-tsing 9.

³⁰ I-tsing 10.

³¹ George Cœdès, *Inscriptions du Cambodge*, vol. 2 (Hanoi: École française d'Extrême-Orient, 1942): 85–86.

³² George Cœdès, *Inscriptions du Cambodge*, vol. 3 (Paris: E. de Boccard, 1951): 89.



Fig. 1. Standing Image of Buddha. Wat Romlok (Ta Keo). National Museum of Cambodia, Phnom Penh. A.D. 610. Page 44 in *L'Art khmer*. by Madeline Giteau and Danielle Gueret. Paris: Somogy Editions d'Art, 1997.

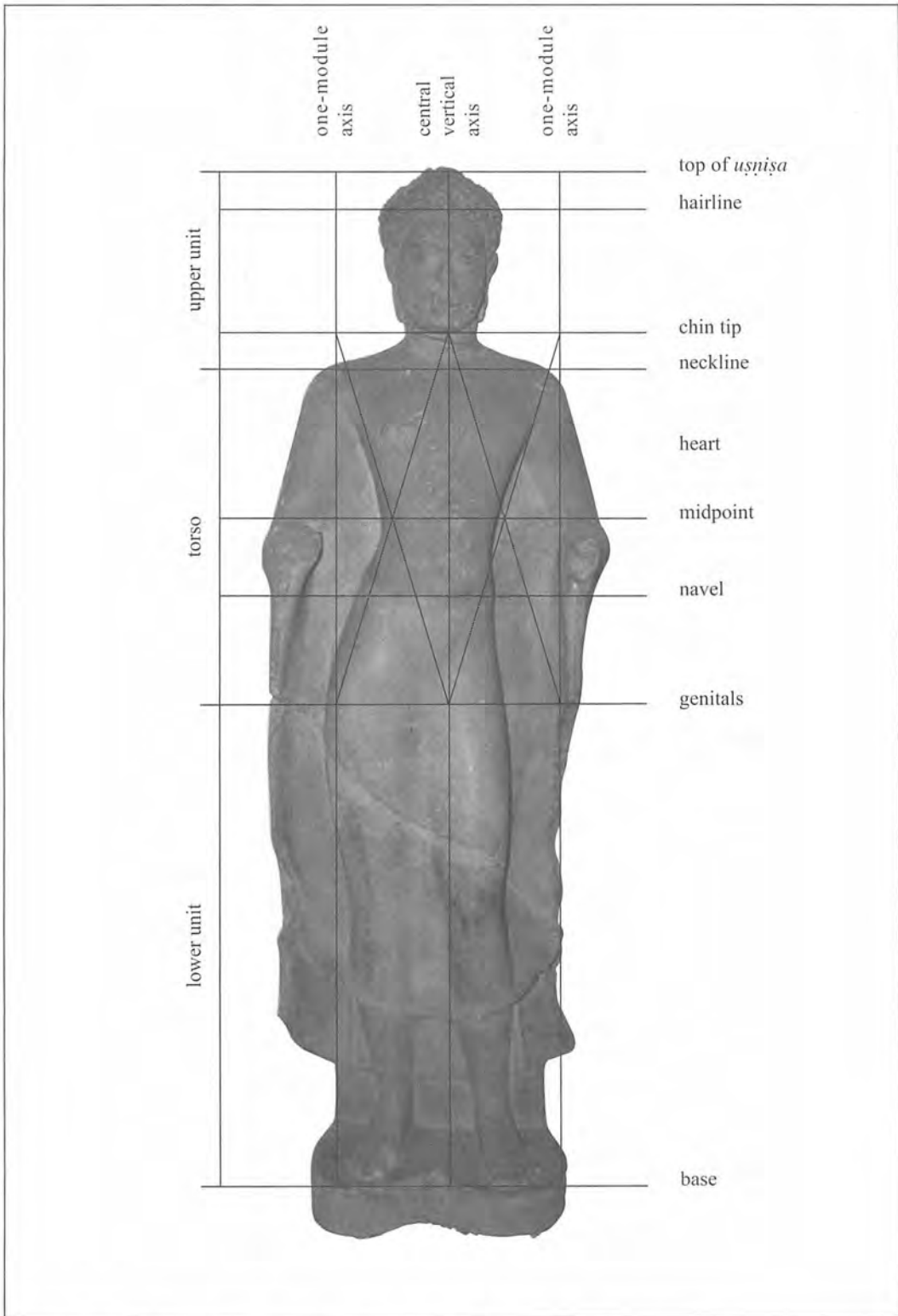


Fig. 1a. Standing Image of Buddha. Wat Romlok (Ta Keo). System of Construction.

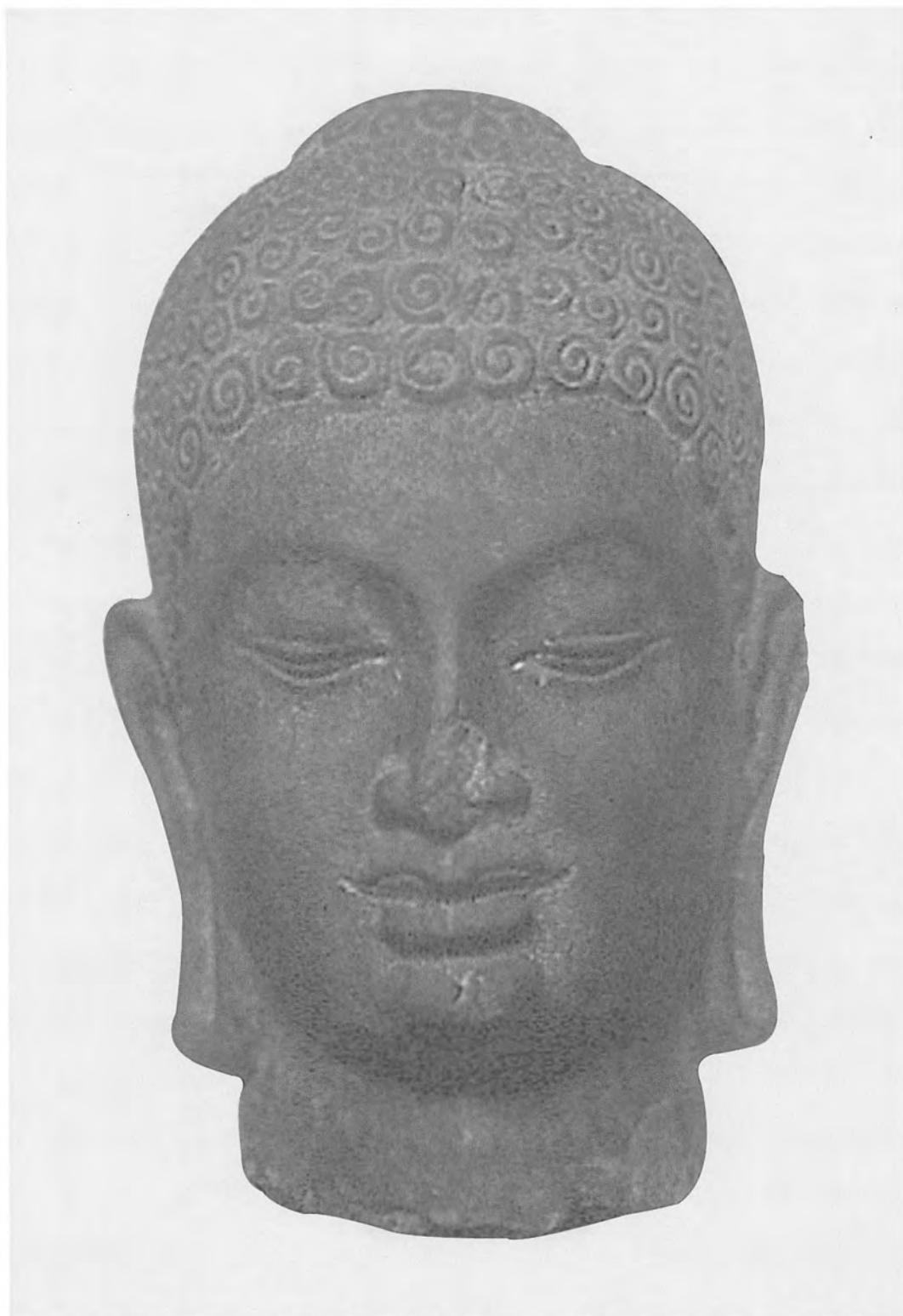


Fig. 2. Buddha Head. Wat Romlok (Ta Keo). National Museum of Cambodia, Phnom Penh. A.D. 610.

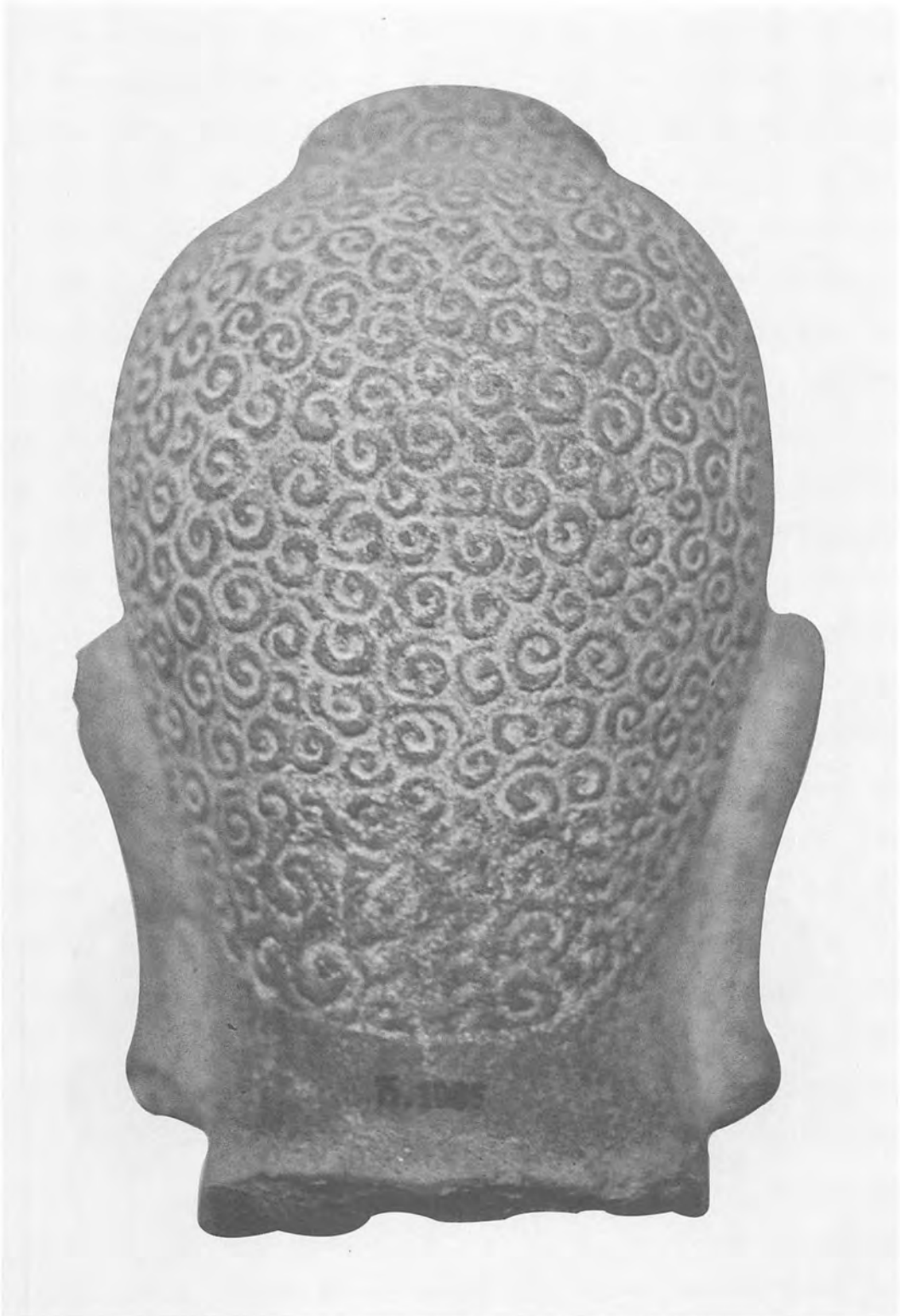


Fig. 3. Clockwise and Counterclockwise Curls. Buddha Head. Wat Romlok (Ta Keo). National Museum of Cambodia, Phnom Penh. A.D. 610.

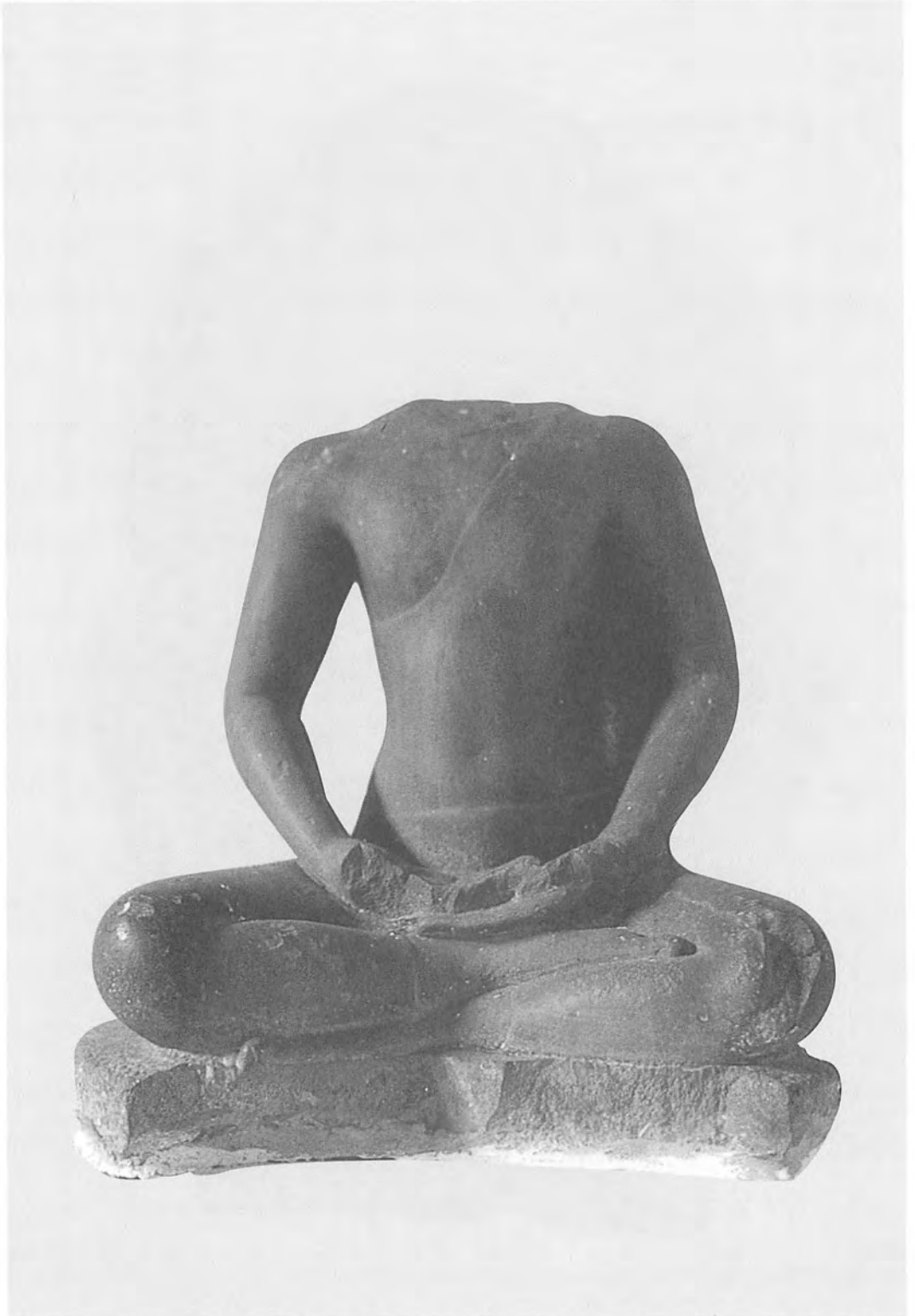


Fig. 4. Seated Image of Buddha. Wat Romlok (Ta Keo). National Museum of Cambodia, Phnom Penh, A.D., 625.

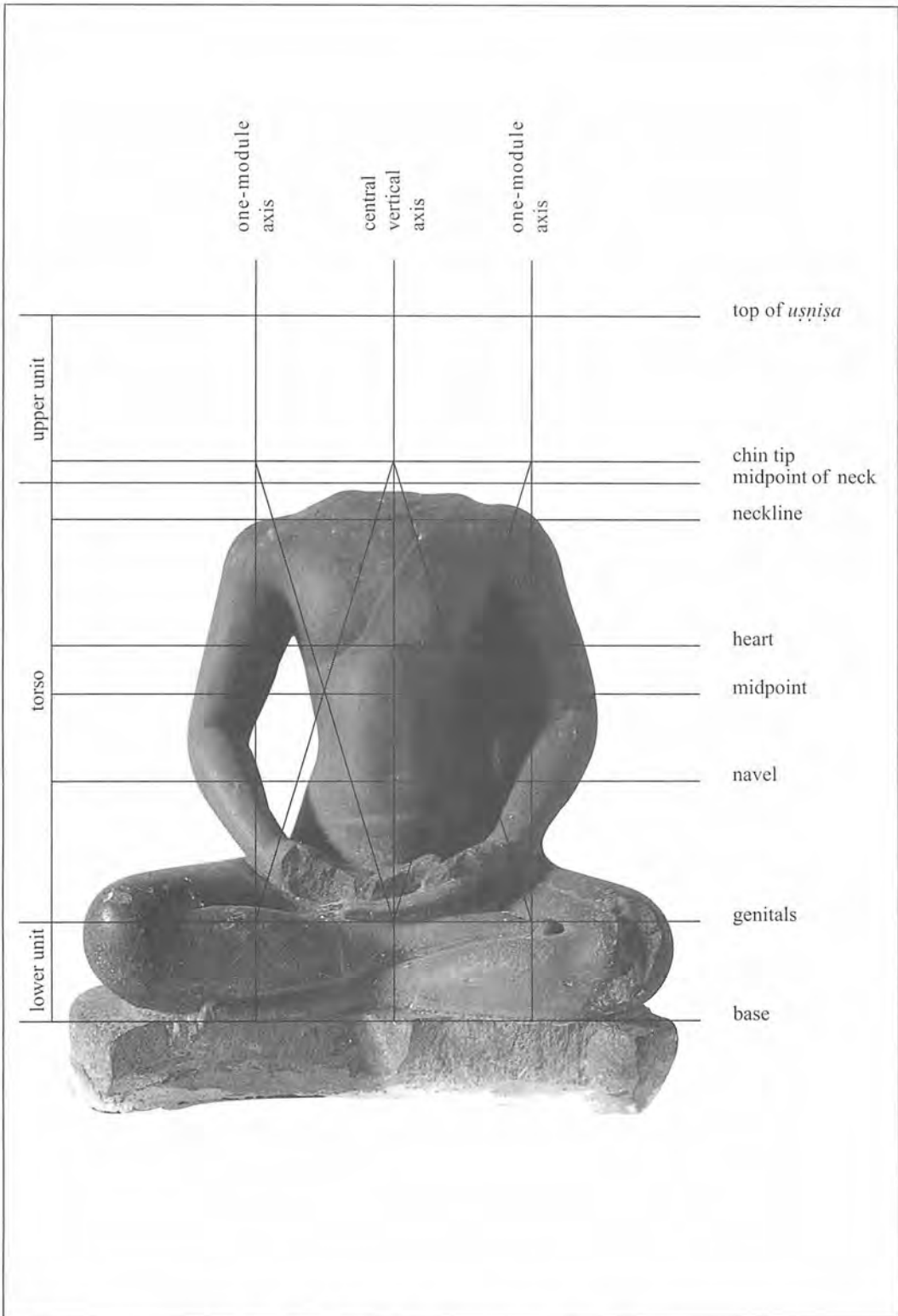


Fig. 4a. Seated Image of Buddha. Wat Romlok (Ta Keo). System of Construction.



Fig. 5. Seated Image of Buddha. Wat Kos (Ta Keo). National Museum of Cambodia, Phnom Penh. A.D. 625.



Fig. 5. The upper unit of the Seated Image of Buddha. Wat Kos (Ta Keo). National Museum of Cambodia, Phnom Penh. A.D. 625.

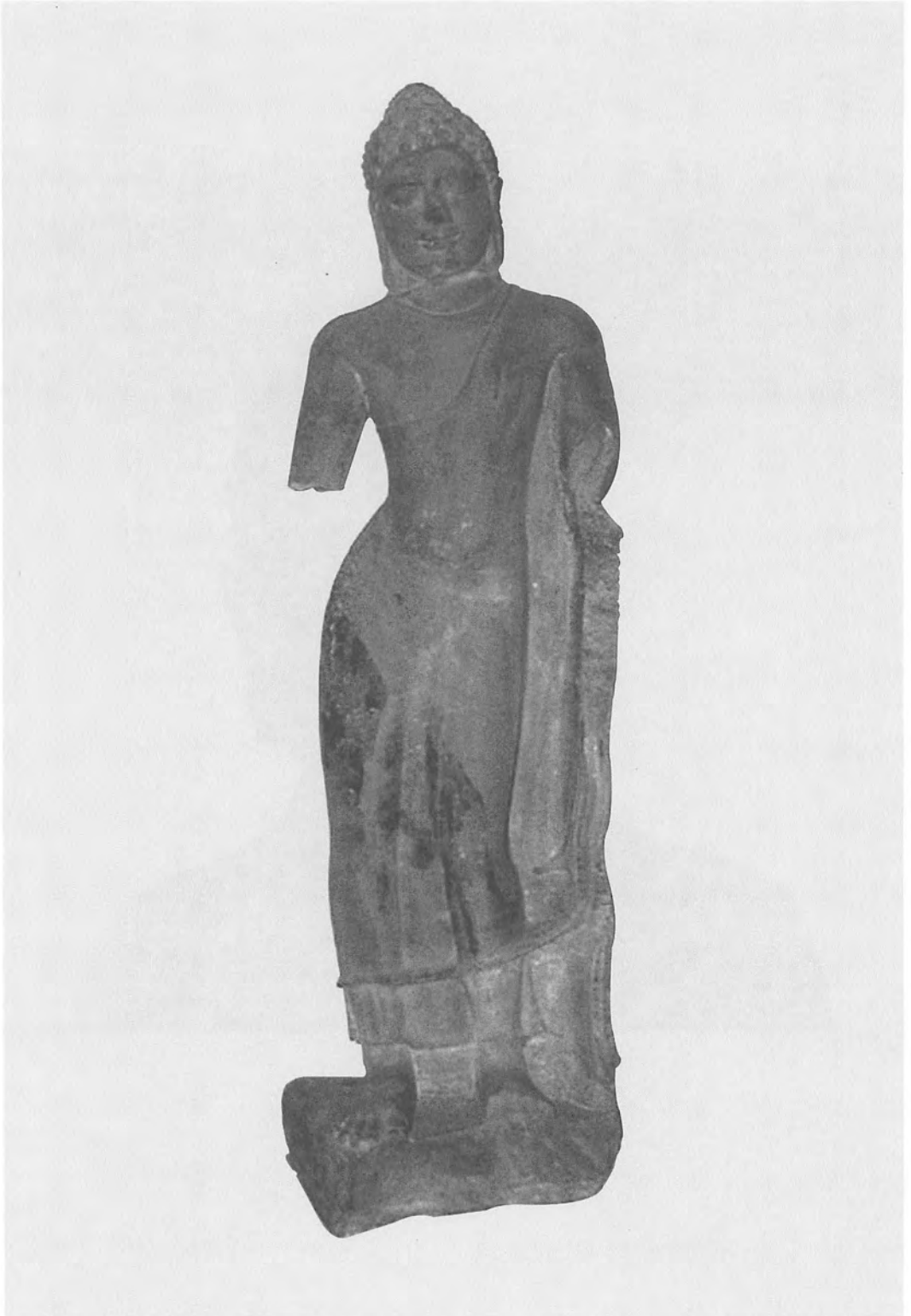


Fig. 6. Standing Image of Buddha. Wat Romlok (Ta Keo). National Museum of Cambodia, Phnom Penh. A.D. 640. Plate I in *Les Collections khmères du Musée Albert Sarraut à Phnom Penh*. By George Groslier. Paris: Les Editions G. Van Oest, 1931.

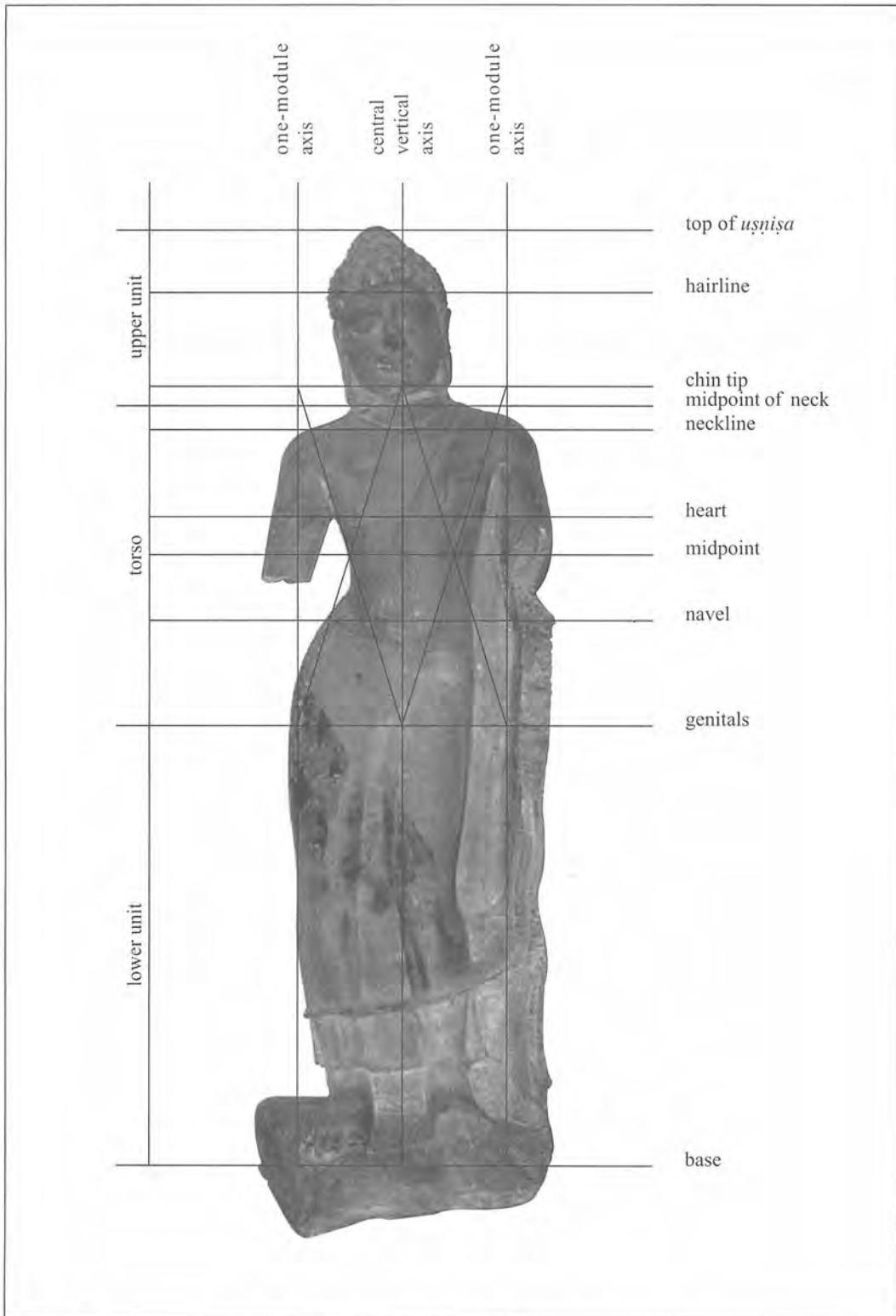


Fig. 6a. Standing Image of Buddha. Wat Romlok (Ta Keo). System of construction.



Fig. 7. Prominent *uṣṇīṣa* with Bun-like curl or Twist. Standing Image of Buddha. Wat Romlok (Ta Keo). National Museum of Cambodia, Phnom Penh. A.D. 640.



Fig. 8. Standing Image of Buddha. Wat Tuol Lean (Ta Keo). National Museum of Cambodia, Phnom Penh. A.D. 650.



Fig. 9. Lintel. Outskirts of Sanctuary 7. Sambor Prei Kuk (Kompong Tom). National Museum of Cambodia, Phnom Penh. A.D. first half or seventh-century. Catalogue 17 in *Sculpture of Angkor and Ancient Cambodia*. By Helen Ibbitson Jessup and Thierry Zephir. Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1997.



Fig. 10. Buddha Head. Wat Tuol Chan. Angkor Borei (Ta Keo). National Museum of Cambodia, Phnom Penh. A.D. 650. Plate 6 in *Khmer Art and the Angkor Civilization*. By Madeline Giteau. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1965.



Fig. 11. Seated Image of Buddha. Phum Thmei (Kompong Speu). National Museum of Cambodia, Phnom Penh. A.D. 650.

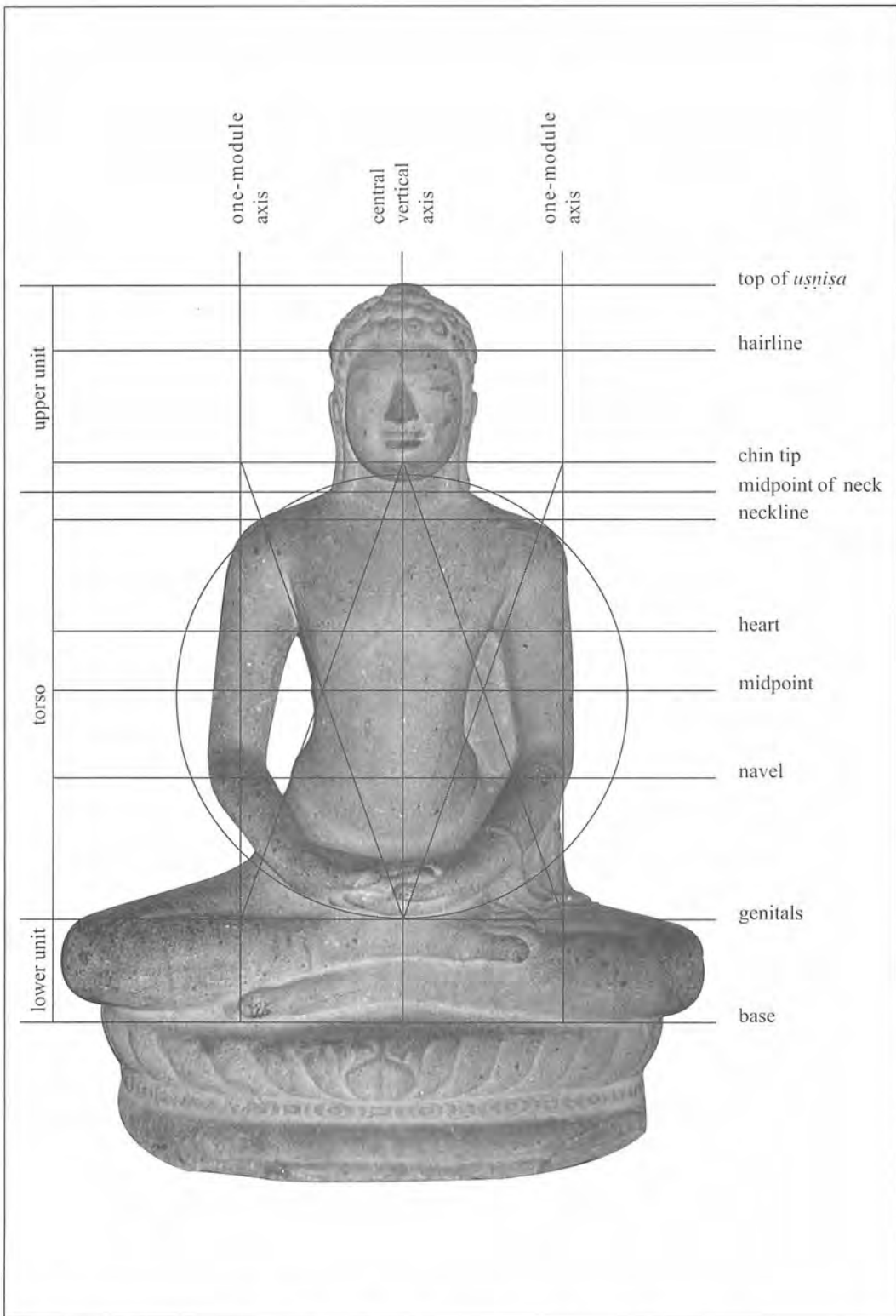


Fig. 11a. Seated Image of Buddha. Phum Thmei (Kompong Speu) System of Construction.



Fig. 12. Standing Image of Buddha. Tuol Ta Hoy. Wat Phnom (Kompong Speu). National Museum of Cambodia, Phnom Penh. A.D. 650.



Fig. 13. Standing Image of Buddha. Tuol Preah Theat (Kompong Speu). Musée Guimet, Paris. A.D. 650, Plate 24 in *The Art of Southeast Asia* by Philip Rawson. New York: Thames and Hudson, 1990.



Fig. 14. Seated Image of Buddha. Wat Kompong Luang. Angkor Borei (Ta Keo). National Museum of Cambodia, Phnom Penh. A.D. 650.

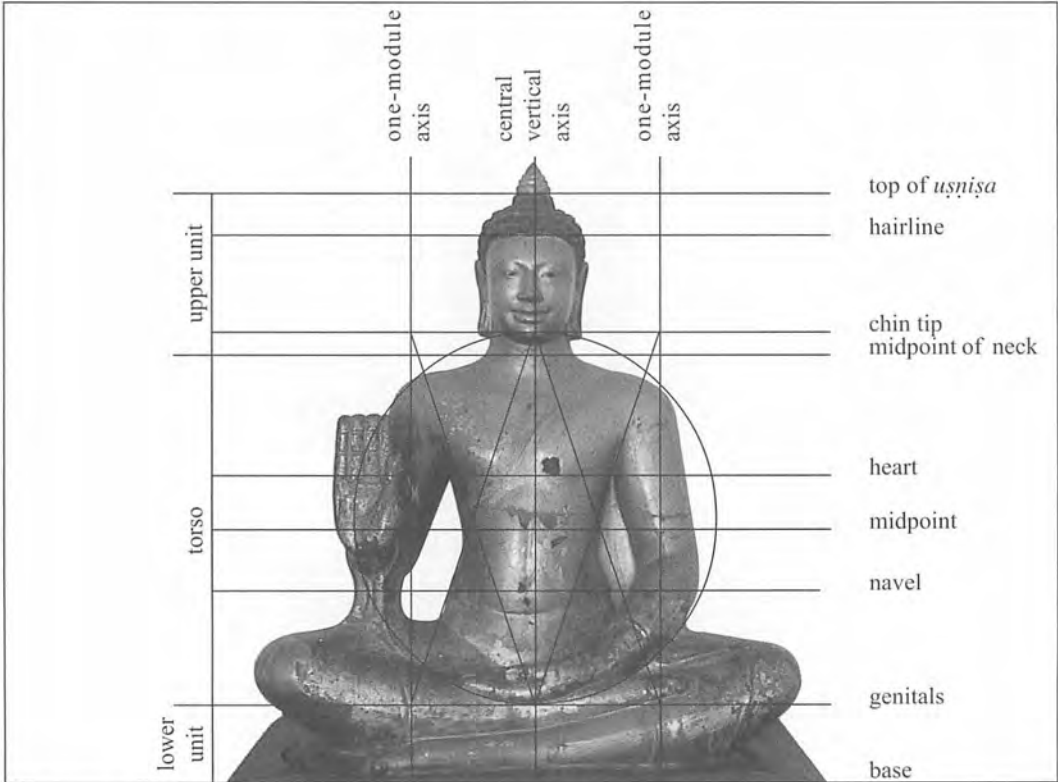


Fig. 14a. Seated Image of Buddha. Wat Kompong Luang. Angkor Borei (Ta Keo). System of Construction.



Fig. 15. Back of Head. Seated Image of Buddha. Wat Kompong Luang, Angkor Borei (Ta Keo). National Museum of Cambodia, Phnom Penh. A.D. 660.



Fig. 16. *Parinirvāṇa* Buddha. Prek Angkor Borei (Ta Keo). National Museum of Cambodia, Phnom Penh. A.D. 670.



Fig. 17. High-Relief Image of Kṛṣṇa Govardhana. Wat Koh (Ta Keo). National Museum of Cambodia at Phnom Penh. A.D. 630. Catalogue 13 in *Sculpture of Angkor and Ancient Cambodia*. By Helen Ibbitson Jessup and Thierry Zephir. Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1997.

Table 1: Inventory of Early Stone Images from Angkor Borei in the National Museum of Cambodia

Acquisition No.	Image	Location	Hindu or Buddhist
B 148	Unidentified Head	Angkor Borei	
B 150, 151	Buddha	Wat Romlok	Buddhist
B 152	Buddha	Wat Tuol Lean	Buddhist
B 153	Buddha	Wat Tuol Lean	Buddhist
B 156	Male Deity (lost)	Wat Tuol Lean	
B 157	Seated Buddha	Wat Koh	Buddhist
B 158	Viṣṇu (lost)	Wat Koh	Hindu
B 161, 162	Harihara	Phnom Da	Hindu
B 163	Female Deity	Phnom Da	Hindu
B 164	Buddha Feet	Wat Kdei Ta Nguoy	Buddhist
B 165	Buddha Head	Wat Kom Nou	Buddhist
B 174	Buddha Head	Wat Kdei Ta Nguoy	Buddhist
B 187	Disc or <i>cakra</i>	Wat Romlok	Hindu
B 235	Buddha	Wat Romlok	Buddhist
B 236	Seated Buddha	Wat Romlok	Buddhist
B 237	Male Torso of Bodhisattva	Wat Kdei Ta Nguoy	Buddhist
B 238	Kṛṣṇa or Skanda	Wat Romlok	Buddhist
B 239	Gaṇeśa	Phnom Da	Hindu
B 366	Viṣṇu with Eight Arms	Phnom Da	Hindu
B 367	Balarāma	Phnom Da	Hindu
B 368	Rāma	Phnom Da	Hindu
B 376	Kṛṣṇa Govardhana	Wat Koh	Hindu
B 696	Buddha Parinirvāṇa	Prek Angkor Borei	Buddhist
B 697	Buddha	Prek Angkor Borei	Buddhist
B 698	Dvarapala or Viṣṇu on Garuda	Prek Angkor Borei	Hindu
B 699	Head of (?)	Angkor Borei	
B 701	Seated Golden Buddha	Wat Kompong Luang	Buddhist
B 703	Head of (?)	Wat Kompong Luang	
B 705	Feet on Socle	Tuol Phnom Tauch	
B 706	Four-Armed Male Torso	Wat Kompong Luang	Hindu
B 707	One-Armed Male Torso	Wat Kompong Luang	
B 708	Four-Armed Male Torso	Wat Kompong Luang	Hindu
B 709	Fragments of Feet on Socle	Wat Kompong Luang	
B 710	Nandin Muzzle	Wat Kompong Luang	Hindu
B 711	Right Hand with Beads	Wat Kompong Luang	
B 712	Right Hand with Disc or <i>cakra</i>	Wat Kompong Luang	Hindu
B 713	Right Hand and Forearm	Wat Kompong Luang	
B 714	Right Hand	Wat Kompong Luang	
B 715	Right Hand Fingers	Wat Kompong Luang	
B 716	Right Hand	Wat Kompong Luang	
B 717	Left Foot of Monkey (?)	Wat Kompong Luang	Hindu
B 718	Lower Part of Addorsed Image	Wat Kompong Luang	
B 719	Fragments of Seated Buddha	Phnom Ba Tep	Buddhist
B 720	Viṣṇu	Phnom Da	Hindu

Acquisition No.	Image	Location	Hindu or Buddhist
B 721	Fragments of Feet on Socle	Phnom Da	Hindu
B 722	Leg Fragments	Phnom Da	
B 723	Harihara	Phnom Da	
B 724	Leg Fragments	Phnom Da	
B 725	Foot Fragments	Phnom Da	
B 726	Male Torso	Phnom Da	
B 727	Viṣṇu Torso	Phnom Da	Hindu
B 729	Paraśurāma	Phnom Da	Hindu
B 730	Kṛṣṇa Torso	Phnom Da	Hindu
B 747	Left Hand of Viṣṇu with Conch	Wat Kompong Luang	Hindu
B 748	Head of Male Deity	Wat Kompong Luang	Buddhist
B 749	Buddha	Trapeang Svay	
B 750	Female Torso	Neak Ta Lok Yeay	Hindu
B 751	Arm Fragments	Tuol Sen Lmut	Hindu
B 752	Right Hand with Broken Ball (?)	Tuol Sen Lmut	
B 753	Leg Fragments	Tuol Sen Lmut	Buddhist
B 754	Buddha Head	Tuol Chan	
#2164	Viṣṇu #1	Temple of the Two Visnus	Hindu
	Viṣṇu #2	Temple of the Two Visnus	Hindu
	Skanda	Angkor Borei	Hindu

Table 2: Dates for Angkor Borei and Other Related Images of Buddha

Groups	Images of Buddha	Dates
Group #1	Wat Romlok standing Buddha Wat Romlok Buddha Head Wat Romlok seated Buddha Wat Kos seated Buddha	A.D. 610–630
Group #2	Wat Romlok standing Buddha	A.D. 640
Group #3	Wat Tuol Lean standing Buddha Wat Tuol Chan Buddha head Phum Thmei seated Buddha Tuol Ta Hoy standing Buddha Tuol Preah Theat standing Buddha	A.D. 650
Group #4	Wat Kompong Luang seated Buddha Parinivāṇa Buddha	A.D. 660–665