

de-emphasizing its Lao and Khmer antecedents. Therefore, this book comes as a very rare treat. Identifying a forgotten artistry that is quickly lost in assimilation, it gives lavish insight and celebrates the sensational artistic expression of the Isan people. The dominating indigo and its various shades and tones illustrate the creativity of a community restricted to natural pigments but yet seemingly unfettered. The startling sense of liberation portrayed by the ever-present sensuality will captivate the reader. Tempting them to scrutinize these erotic scenes invites the understanding of a community that openly embraces their desires. Above all, the amalgamation of royals, deities and peasants in one composition is a rare sight— impossible to be found in such small compass anywhere in Thailand, thus conveying the unique democratic lifestyle of the Isan heartland.

Even though the book design leaves much to be desired, the intention to highlight a declining form of art is commendable. The substance of the subject is so rich and bewitching it bursts out of the pages. If only the composition of the book had been given more thought, the book would be singing in soprano! But then as the old English proverb goes, ‘Don’t judge a book by its cover!’

Tulaya Pornpiriyakulchai

---

*Studies on the Art of Ancient Cambodia: Ten Articles by Jean Boisselier*, tr. & ed. by NATASHA EILENBERG & ROBERT L. BROWN (Phnom Penh: Reyum Publishing, 2008). ISBN 978 999 5055 38 7 (soft)

Jean Boisselier (b. Paris 1912 – d. Paris 1996) was arguably the 20<sup>th</sup> century’s preeminent scholar of mainland Southeast Asia art history. Over the course of a long career that consisted of various institutional affiliations, including the Phnom Penh Museum (now the National Museum of Cambodia), the École française d’Extrême Orient (EFEO), the Centre national de la recherche scientifique (CNRS), Silpakorn University, and the University of Paris-III, Boisselier generated a prodigious body of erudite scholarship predominantly on the art histories of Cambodia, Thailand, and the Cham of Vietnam, much of which continues to set the standard today. With this book, art historians Natasha Eilenberg (an independent scholar) and Robert Brown (University of California, Los Angeles) have gathered ten of Boisselier’s most important articles on Khmer art, all originally published in French, and provided painstaking English-language translations with helpful annotations and insightful introductions to each essay. Students and scholars of early Khmer art and culture, and of early Southeast Asia in general, will find it to be a very important and useful publication.

Nearly twenty years in the making, *Studies on the Art of Ancient Cambodia* represents the third of Natasha Eilen-

berg's published projects intended to honor Boisselier (her teacher and friend) and to bring his scholarship and legacy greater exposure among English-reading audiences. It was preceded first by an expanded English edition of Boisselier's *Tendances de l'art khmèr*, originally published in 1956 (Boisselier 1989). Next there appeared a festschrift co-edited with Brown and M. C. Subhadradis Diskul, *Living a Life in Accord with Dhamma*, with diverse contributions from scholars worldwide that reflected the immense scope of both Boisselier's influence and interests (Eilenberg et al 1997).

Eilenberg and Elliott's *Trends in Khmer Art* received high praise from Boisselier himself and plans thereafter ensued to publish English translations of several of his articles as well. Thus *Studies on the Art of Ancient Cambodia* opens with a copy of a letter, written by Boisselier to Brown and Eilenberg in October 1990, authorizing them to proceed and stipulating that the choice of articles would be decided by mutual consent. Given Boisselier's initial involvement with the project, one can hardly quibble with the resultant contents of this book. It is worth mentioning, however, that they are the tip of an iceberg, and there are many other worthy candidates that do not appear here, including important studies of Preangkorian lintels, ancient Khmer bronzes, and the development of the diadem in Angkorian period sculpture. For the interested reader, it may also be helpful to note that several of Boisselier's other articles, but none of the aforementioned, were previously translated into English in various issues

of *SPAFA Digest*. Some of his work on Mon/Dvaravati, Thai, and Cham art history has already appeared in English. Most of these citations are included in the convenient "Selected Bibliography of Jean Boisselier" placed at the beginning of *Studies on the Art of Ancient Cambodia*. Published previously in *Living a Life in Accord with Dhamma* (and elsewhere), it was compiled by Madeleine Giteau, another of the most distinguished French art historians of Cambodia who sadly is no longer with us. Suffice it to say that *Studies on the Art of Ancient Cambodia* was sanctioned by the author himself and appears to have been a collaborative labor of love by scholars who knew the man and his work quite well.

This Boisselier compilation joins other recent English-language translations of seminal French scholarship on Southeast Asian art history by Mireille Bénisti and Pierre Dupont. These three scholars, continuing the pioneering work of Philippe Stern and Gilberte de Coral Rémusat, developed an art historical method for sculpture and architecture that remains responsible for much of what we know about Khmer art history, particularly in terms of chronology and stylistic categories. They also did much to advance the study and theory of the concept of "style" for the discipline of art history as a whole, although their contributions often go unrecognized by art historians working outside of Southeast Asia. While new evidence and new ways of thinking have led some scholars to question some of their arguments, it is nevertheless the

case that their work is the foundation upon which all subsequent research on early Khmer art rests and with which new theories must reckon. As Brown writes of Boisselier in his introduction, "...it remains that only by knowing what he has argued can we make any clear judgments regarding where our scholarship should lead." (p. vii).

The methodology developed by these scholars posits an internal logic to the "evolution" of artistic motifs. By orienting analysis around relatively securely dated monuments, the stylistic sequence of undated sculpture and architecture can be ascertained through minute analysis of their constituent parts, in sculpture primarily through details of coiffure, costume, and jewelry and, in architecture, through elements like lintels, colonnettes, pediments, pilasters, etc. Boisselier's masterful application of this approach is on full display in *Studies on the Art of Ancient Cambodia's* ten essays, which are organized according to the original dates of publication (covering the period 1951-1991).

The first three essays (ch. 1-3), together constituting over half of the entire book, are particularly strong and thorough examples of Boisselier's methodology: "Garuda in Khmer Art" (1951), "Běñ Mālā and the Chronology of the Monuments of the Añkor [Angkor] Wat Style" (1952), and "A Definition of the Añkor Wat Sculptural Style" (1952). These essays remain the definitive word on each of these topics. The two 1952 essays are companion pieces that were published back-to-back in the *Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême Orient*

and are best read together. Through intricate formal analysis, they establish the relative chronology of temples and statuary spanning the period from the end of the Baphuon to the beginning of the Bayon style, or from ca. 1080-1180 CE. Related to these is the much shorter article translated as ch. 8 ["A Khmer Torso in the Oriental Museum of Venice" (1960)], which brings precision to the beginning of the Baphuon style of sculpture (as well as the preceding style of Banteay Srei) by focusing on the peculiarities and dating of a single lesser-known image. Běñ Mālā (more commonly spelled today as Beng Mealea), a major temple complex that has thus far yielded no inscriptions, proved particularly susceptible to art historical methods. Boisselier's comparative analysis of the architectural layout, elements, and decoration—as well as the sculpture from the site—is significant for demonstrating that it is a temple contemporary with Angkor Wat rather than an earlier monument as scholars had previously thought.

"Garuda in Khmer Art" (ch. 1) incorporates analysis of iconography as well as style in order to demonstrate the typology, developmental chronology, and innovations of Garuda images in Khmer sculpture from the 7<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup>/14<sup>th</sup> centuries. The study is particularly notable for demonstrating the adaptations that Garuda underwent after his initial appearance in Preangkorian Khmer art (pre-9<sup>th</sup> cent. CE) in what Boisselier calls the "traditional" and "Indianized" role as adversary of the *nāgas*. This role continued in the Angkorian period,

but then Garuḍa also began to appear as an independent divinity and as Viṣṇu's *vāhana*. Finally, during the 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries, Garuḍa was re-envisioned, apparently in a specifically and exclusively Khmer manner, from a Vaiṣṇava to a Mahayana Buddhist divinity and protector of the Buddha and some *nāgas*. This essay is most usefully read alongside Boisselier's numerous studies of art and architecture during the period of the Bayon style (ca. 1180-1230 CE) and the reign of Jayavarman VII (ca. 1182/3-1218 CE), including ch. 9 of the present volume, "Identification of Some Khmer Images of Avalokiteśvara: The Bantāy Chmār Bas-Reliefs" (1965), which convincingly argues that a Mahayana Buddhist text, the *Kāraṇḍavyūha sūtra*, was the source for several of the reliefs.

The remaining five articles in *Studies on the Art of Ancient Cambodia* include varying degrees of analysis of both style and iconography to tackle particular art historical problems involving one particular sculpture or a small group of closely related images. Chapter 4, "The Harihara from Bākoñ" (1952) examines the transformation of the cylindrical miter so common in statuary of the Preangkorian period and Kulen style to the polygonal tiered arrangement of the headdress that first appears in the Preah Ko style (which, in the editorial notes that precede the essay, is mislabeled as the "Bākoñ style"). Chapter 5, "An Unpublished Female Statue of the Sambor Style" (1955) assembles all the then-known female statuary that can be related to the Sambor Prei Kuk style (exactly four images), but not necessarily

"all of the important early female sculpture known up until that time," as the editors state in their introduction. This depends on what is meant by "early;" for the corpus of Preangkorian female sculpture known then, one also needs to consult Pierre Dupont, *La statuaire pré-angkorienne*, published the same year as Boisselier's article (Dupont 1955). In ch. 6, "The Art of Champa and of Prangkorian Cambodia: The Date of Mi-s' on [sic] E-1" (1956), Boisselier analyzes several Khmer and Cham lintels (and a Cham tympanum) that depict "Viṣṇu's sleep and the birth of Brahmā" in order to demonstrate stylistic and political relationships between the Khmer and Cham in the mid-seventh century CE.

Rounding out the collection are two essays (ch. 7 and 10) that cast a wider net to include material from Peninsular Thailand and Indonesia in addition to Cambodia and Vietnam: "The Viṣṇu from Tjibuaja (Western Java) and Southeast Asian Sculpture" (1959) and "A Preangkorian Wood Buddha and Its Indonesian Affinities" (1991). Both of these articles raise fascinating questions about the interconnections of Southeast Asian art, and both were innovative in assembling groups of related sculptures from far-flung regions that continue to arouse controversy and debate. That this should be so is primarily due to the fact that, for different reasons and subsequent to Boisselier's work, many of the images discussed in these articles have been argued to be among the earliest Hindu-Buddhist sculpture in all Southeast Asia.

In "The Viṣṇu from Tjibuaja" (or

“Cibuaya”), Boisselier groups together iconographically varied and geographically dispersed images that, to him, suggest an 8<sup>th</sup>-century CE date based on “aberrant” aesthetic qualities and what he characterizes as a regressive sculpting technique. His argument is partially based on the assumption that certain elements found in Vaiṣṇava images, namely the conch-on-hip hand position and the faceted mace with a bulbous and ribbed head, did not appear in Indian art before the 8<sup>th</sup> century. Both assumptions have subsequently been proven to be false, and scholars have been unanimous in rejecting Boisselier’s dates for the conch-on-hip images in favor of earlier dates, but there remains a lack of consensus over whether the earliest of these images should be dated to ca. 400 at the latest or to ca. 500 CE (the latter of which this reviewer, among others, has advocated). Later in his career, Boisselier recanted his dating of some of these sculptures, but his continued insistence that their technique represented stages of “degradation” remains open to doubt (a full discussion of all of these issues can be found in Lavy 2004, ch. 6).

“A Preangkorian Wood Buddha” also relies on comparative analysis, this time to identify an aspect of Buddhist iconography that is unusual in Southeast Asia (an identification that, in fact, had been made earlier and independently by Brown himself) and to suggest an 8<sup>th</sup>-century CE date for a wood Buddha from Bình Hoà (Long An province, Southern Vietnam). These arguments were based in part on style and in part on associations with the expansion of

Mahayana Buddhism via Śrīvijaya. An 8<sup>th</sup> century dating is not inconceivable, but stylistic considerations not discussed by Boisselier, as well as recent C14 analysis of this and related wood Buddha images from the Mekong Delta region, suggest that a late 6<sup>th</sup> – 7<sup>th</sup> century date is much more likely (for C14 dates, see Vo Si Khai 2003, 85). In light of recent revisionist scholarship regarding Mahayana Buddhism and Buddhist monastic lineages, it is doubtful that many scholars today would accept Boisselier’s implication that the mode of drapery on a Buddha image indicates a scholastic/sectarian affiliation for the artists or culture that produced it.

These rare instances in which Boisselier’s interpretations have not held up so well are nonetheless evidence of his bold and inquisitive spirit. And even when he is making points with which we might disagree, his scholarship is consistently thought-provoking and rewarding. It is therefore unfortunate that his work is not better known and his contributions more adequately acknowledged. Brown attributes the fact that Boisselier “has not been widely read” to “in part...the difficulty of the French originals” (vii). Indeed his writing is “often ambiguous and sometimes convoluted” (v) and, if Boisselier’s prose seems tedious at times, it is because his arguments are so thorough.

The erudition of Boisselier (and Dupont, Bénisti, etc.) combined with the often difficult manner in which these ideas were originally communicated has perhaps created a barrier between the scholarship and subsequent gen-

erations of students outside of France, principally in Southeast Asia and in the United States, and has perhaps hindered the further growth of the discipline. This scholarship is, nevertheless, so fundamental that anyone who reads anything about Khmer and Cham art history is invariably being steeped in ideas developed by Boisselier, but too often filtered through the work of other scholars rather than through the original publications with all their depth and nuance. Eilenberg and Brown aim to help correct this problem. Recognizing a lamentable but very real “lack of reading ability in French among many people today who are interested in the art and architecture of Southeast Asia,” they have directed their book particularly to “Southeast Asian readers, and specifically the students” who might benefit most from English translations of some of Boisselier’s most challenging essays (v). It must be admitted, however, that Boisselier can be difficult to read in any language.

To maintain the integrity of the original publications, Eilenberg and Brown have produced faithful, accurate translations and have even retained Boisselier’s spelling conventions and citation style, which they acknowledge, are inconsistent from one essay to the next. The results may be somewhat confusing, particularly to those readers unfamiliar with the subject or who may be attuned to more recent spelling conventions. The extensive use of diacritical marks seems even to have encumbered the printing process, and in some cases led to unintended deviations from Bois-

selier’s original texts or to outright misspellings. Among these (and other examples could be produced as well), “Phimai” is spelled “Phĩmai” in the original source text for chapter 2, however, it appears several times here (in error) as “Ph mai.” In chapter 6 “My Son” (or *Mỹ Sơn*) is variably spelled “Mi-s’on” [sic] and “Mi-so’n.” The editors have added convenient lists of abbreviations at the end of many chapters to clarify Boisselier’s bibliographic citations, but, in addition to some inconsistencies, there are occasional omissions that could make following up his footnotes difficult. Readers unfamiliar with the numbering system of the *Inventaire des monuments du Cambodge*, first developed by Lunet de Lajonquière in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, might be perplexed by Boisselier’s references (in ch. 2) to the two temples called Preah Khan, sometimes by location and sometimes by inventory number. One is located at Angkor (IK.522) and the other, known as “Preah Khan of Kompong Svay” or “Prasat Bakan” (IK.173) is located in what is today Preah Vihear province. Standardization and simplification of some of these minor problems in *Studies on the Art of Ancient Cambodia* would have yielded a more user-friendly final product without compromising any of the substance of the writing or arguments therein.

With this book, not only do Eilenberg and Brown provide very good English language translations of important French scholarship that are true to the spirit and the letter of the originals; but also, thanks to their introductory

material and editorial notes, they help to clarify and explain difficult passages and to situate the essays in appropriate critical and historiographical context. Quality translation of older, now classic, scholarship can be an arduous, underappreciated task that brings little reward to translators, and may hover somewhat beneath the radar of academia, particularly when issued by a lesser-known regional publisher. It would be a shame if such a fate were to befall *Studies on the Art of Ancient Cambodia*. This is outstanding scholarship that deserves to be read; and, to the credit of Eilenberg and Brown, it is now more widely accessible.

*Studies on the Art of Ancient Cambodia* is a fitting final testament to Natasha Eilenberg's long-time devotion to the study of Khmer art history and a spirit of generosity that can otherwise be witnessed in the numerous gifts of Khmer sculpture that she made to museums throughout the United States. These include two palanquin hooks adorned with images of Garuḍa that were given to the Walters Art Museum (Baltimore, Maryland) in 2000, in memory of Jean Boisselier (Accession Nos. 54.2959 and 54.2960).

## REFERENCES

- Bénisti, Mireille, 2003. *Stylistics of Early Khmer Art*, 2 vols., trans. by K. Thanikaimony. New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts and Aryan Books International.
- Boisselier, Jean, 1989. *Trends in Khmer Art*, trans. by N. Eilenberg and M. Elliott. Ithaca, NY: SEAP, Cornell University (originally published as *Tendances de l'art khmèr* in 1956).
- Dupont, Pierre, 1955. *La statue préangkorienne*. *Artibus Asiae Supplementum XV*. Ascona: Imprimerie Artibus Asiae.
- — —, 2006. *The archaeology of the Mons of Dvāravatī*, 2 vols., trans. and updated by Joyanto K. Sen. Bangkok: White Lotus (originally published as *L'archéologie mônè de Dvāravatī* in 1959).
- Eilenberg, Natasha, M. C. Subhadradis Diskul, and Robert L. Brown (eds.), 1997. *Living a Life in Accord with Dhamma: Papers in Honor of Professor Jean Boisselier on his Eightieth Birthday*. Bangkok: Silpakorn University.
- Lavy, Paul A., 2004. *Viṣṇu and Harihara in the Art and Politics of Early Historic Southeast Asia*, Ph.D. dissertation (unpubl.). Department of Art History, University of California, Los Angeles.
- Vo Si Khai, 2003. "The Kingdom of Fu Nan and the Culture of Oc Eo," in Khoo, James C. M. (ed.) *Art and Archaeology of Fu Nan-Pre-Khmer Kingdom of Lower Mekong Valley*. Bangkok: Orchid Press, pp. 35-85.

Paul A. Lavy

---

ED. NOTE—Natasha Eilenberg passed away in February 2012, after this review had been submitted for publication in these pages.