

## FISH SCENES, SYMBOLISM, AND KINGSHIP IN THE BAS-RELIEFS OF ANGKOR WAT AND THE BAYON

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### ABSTRACT

Angkor Wat's "Churning of the Sea of Milk" bas-relief masterpiece is unique among "Churning" depictions for its naturalistic presentation of fishes and other aquatic animals. Their behavior clearly indicates that they have been poisoned, as related in the myth of the Churning. The poisoned fish are being cut in two by the sword of Suryavarman II as Vishnu. Also notable is the inclusion of the mythical beast known as *gajasimha*. The little known Angkor Wat bas-relief called the "Fête nautique des Dvaravati", also a masterpiece, realistically portrays people making music, playing chess, fishing, hunting, and engaged in other activities, in the midst of a forested wetland filled with birds, fish, crocodiles and other animals. The scene also portrays two royal pleasure boats, one with Garuda on its prow and the other with a *gajasimha*.

*Gajasimha* is an Indian and Khmer *makara* associated in Khmer iconography with the Hindu god Vishnu. Suryavarman II was one of the few Khmer kings to be identified with Vishnu. Garuda and *gajasimha* were employed repeatedly to symbolize this relationship. This symbolism is employed in several significant innovations in Khmer iconography. These include replacement of the naga Ananta or Sesha by a *gajasimha* in representations of Vishnu *Anantasayin*; the distinctive "Garuda-gajasimha" balustrades, and use of the head of *gajasimha* or its elephantine trunk as the apical finials (*dong chivea, niya, or chofa*) on Cambodian, Laotian, and Thai Buddhist temples.

Fish figure importantly in numerous Bayon bas-reliefs. Many of these depict ordinary people engaged in activities such as cooking, gambling, cockfighting, and fishing. Others apparently depict events or incidents in the life of Jayavarman VII including his military victories, building activities, and apotheosis as *Jayabuddha* or Buddha-King, as well as his tolerant attitude towards other religions. There are also indications that he had an abiding interest in natural history.

**Key words:** Angkor Wat, Bayon, "Churning of the Sea of Milk", "Fête nautique des Dvaravati" Suryavarman II, Jayavarman VII, fish species, *gajasimha, makara, chofa*

### INTRODUCTION

This thematic study, focusing on scenes with fish in the bas-reliefs of Angkor Wat and the Bayon, sheds light on two of the greatest Khmer kings, Suryavarman II and Jayavarman VII. It also provides observations and hypotheses on the Shivaite anti-Buddhist reaction during the reign of Jayavarman VIII, identification or significance of various ancient Khmer artifacts, including the West Mebon bronze statue of a reclining Vishnu, and the natural history of ancient Cambodia.

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Angkor Wat has three bas-reliefs with fish. The exquisite "Fête nautique des Dvaravati" and a small version of the "Churning of the Sea of Milk" are located in the Southwest Corner Pavilion. These two reliefs are both now badly damaged. The illustrations of the Fête nautique des Dvaravati presented here are based on EFEO archival photographs taken in 1962 when it was still almost completely intact. The third Angkor Wat bas-relief with fish is the large version of the "Churning of the Sea of Milk" on the South wing of the Eastern gallery of bas-reliefs. It is in excellent condition.

The Bayon has numerous bas-reliefs in which fish are prominently displayed. The entire southern gallery of the exterior wall, including the famous Khmer-Cham naval battle, is almost continuously decorated with fish. Included are numerous scenes of people catching, marketing, and cooking fish. Bas-reliefs on other walls depict fish in ponds, often in the vicinity of temples. There are also strange depictions of a large fish cut in half and of a pair of fish with human heads. Location of Bayon fish scene bas-reliefs discussed in this article is indicated in Figure 1.

Before describing and discussing the fish scenes some explanation of my methods and objectives may be helpful. These may be considered under "illustrations," "thematic approach," "hypotheses," and "review process."

**Illustrations.**—I have examined nearly all of the bas-reliefs and other artifacts mentioned in this article. Whenever possible I have photographed them. The resulting photographs, while not always of publishable quality, have proven invaluable for comparison. It is not possible to provide illustrations here of all of the relevant bas-reliefs, etc. Since the number of illustrations had to be limited, priority has been given to photographs illustrating bas-reliefs or other artifacts 1) for which photos are unavailable elsewhere; and 2) that are essential for following the discussion. The first category includes photos of the "Fête nautique des Dvaravati" (Southwest Corner Pavilion of Angkor Wat), "Marriage of the *nagi* maiden" (Bayon), Shivaite reconstitution of a Buddhist temple (Bayon), and of a "Vishnu mounted on a *gajasimha*" lintel (Bayon). The illustrations of a Vishnuite lintel from the West Mebon are unavailable elsewhere and are also essential to the discussion of the West Mebon bronze of "Vishnu Reclining on the Sea of Milk."

**Thematic approach.**—A thematic approach based on bas-reliefs of Angkor Wat and the Bayon has been employed in studies of ancient Khmer wardrobe and coiffeur by MARCHAL (1927) and of ancient Khmer military organization and arms by JACQ-HERGOUALC'H (1979). It is surprising that there has been almost no thematic study of the botany or zoology.

The present study of fish bas-reliefs might have been limited to the Churning of the Sea of Milk of Angkor Wat and the naval battle scene of the Bayon, each including over one thousand fish. Almost from the beginning, however, it was decided to consider as many fish scenes as possible because it would be more interesting. During an initial visit to Angkor Wat and the Bayon in 1994 I set about photographing all bas-relief scenes in which fish are relatively prominent. This had unexpected consequences. Including all Bayon scenes with fish moats or ponds brought together a series of religious scenes that had not been closely examined or compared previously. It seems likely that Jayavarman VII is represented in several of these scenes. If this is so, it indicates that even though he was a Mahayanaist Buddhist Jayavarman VII exercised (or at least is portrayed as exercising) a broad-minded, ecumenical or at least tolerant approach to other religions (as documented by Briggs, 1951, and others).

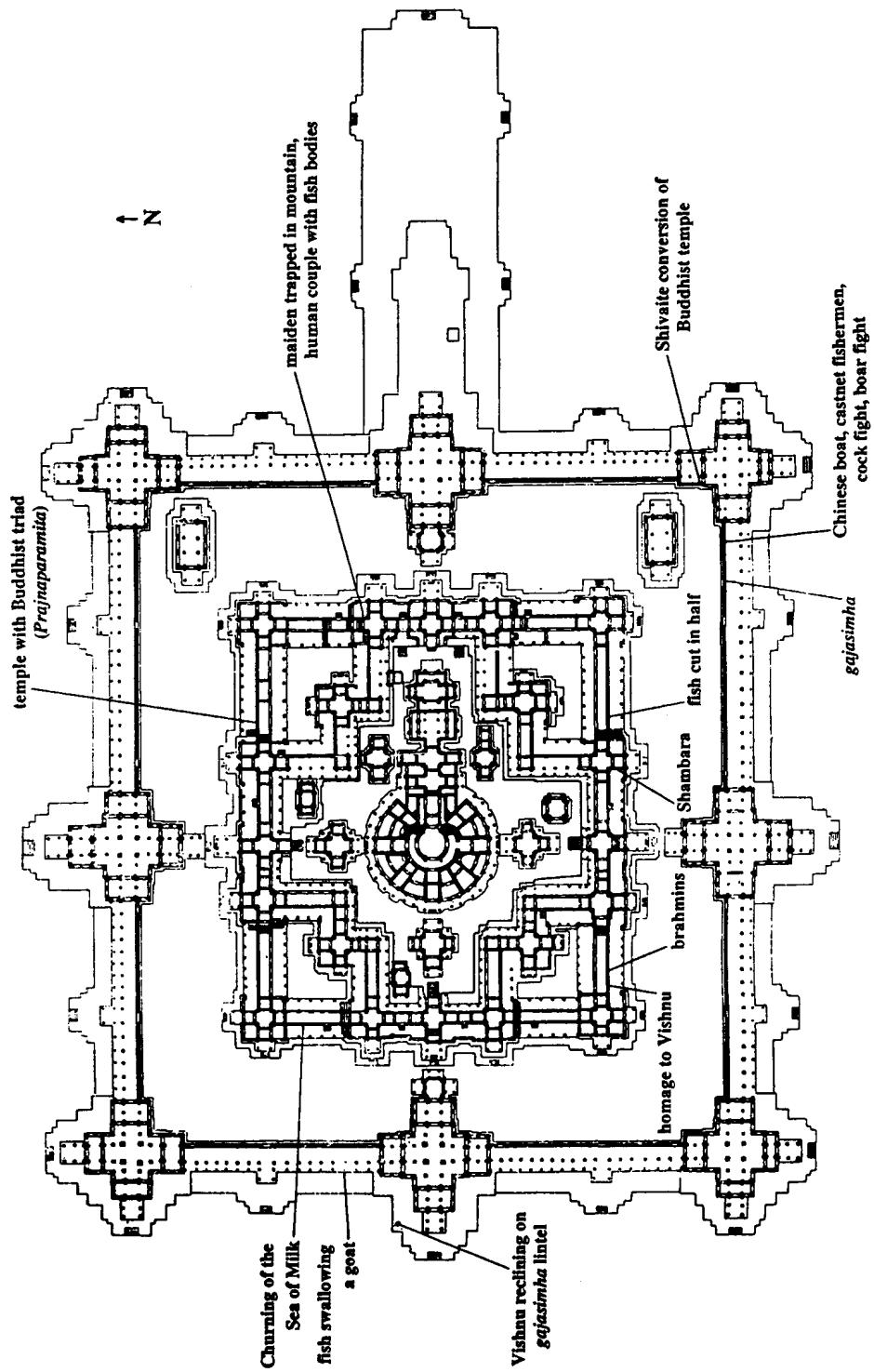


Figure 1. Bayon. Location of items discussed in text.

**Hypotheses.**—A number of hypotheses are advanced in this paper. These represent potentially its most significant contribution. Worthwhile hypotheses should offer new insights and change the way we think about things or add substantially to what we know about them. They should be susceptible to testing or checking. The best hypotheses lead, sometimes rapidly, to a spate of predictions, discoveries, and further hypotheses. The most significant new hypothesis presented here concerns the symbolic relationship between Suryavarman II and the *gajasimha*. This hypothesis was initiated by the observation of numerous *gajasimha* in the Angkor Wat Churning of the Sea of Milk bas-relief in which Suryavarman II is portrayed as Vishnu. It quickly led to a series of subsidiary hypotheses such as the identification of the West Mebon bronze Vishnu as another representation of Suryavarman II and the prediction (as yet unfulfilled) that the unrecovered remains of the statue will include the tetrapod limbs or other pieces identifiable with the *gajasimha*. Support for this hypothesis comes from an EFEO archival photograph of a bas-relief from the West Mebon in which Vishnu is shown mounted on a *gajasimha*. Another subsidiary hypothesis is that the main inspiration for the apical finial or *chofa* of Cambodian, Laotian, and Thai Buddhist temples is not the naga or some kind of bird, as commonly supposed, but rather the *gajasimha* of Suryavarman II.

**Review process.**—Efforts have been made to solicit comments on the manuscript of this study from scholars with diverse backgrounds in ancient Khmer topics. This has resulted in a considerable input of ideas, information and criticism. In most papers contributions of reviewers are simply assimilated into the manuscript and the reviewers are mentioned briefly in the Acknowledgments. Here some critical and interesting comments made by reviewers and other commentators are reviewed in the discussion.

#### ANGKOR WAT “CHURNING OF THE SEA OF MILK”

##### Figures 4–7

Myths are living organisms that change constantly... Great myths are richly ambiguous and elusive; their truth's cannot be filed away into scholar's neat categories... Each Hindu myth celebrates the belief that the universe is boundlessly various, that everything occurs simultaneously, that all possibilities may exist without excluding each other.

—Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty in O’FLAHERTY, 1975: ii, 10

Renowned as the largest religious edifice ever built, Angkor Wat also is famous for its superb bas-reliefs, especially the unsurpassed Vishnuite version of the “Churning of the Sea of Milk” (in Sanskrit “*Samudramathana*”). The composition, scale, craftsmanship, intrinsic interest, dynamism, and naturalism displayed in this scene (hereafter referred to as the “Angkor Wat Churning”) make it one of the world’s great masterpieces. It occupies the South wing of the Eastern gallery of Bas-reliefs.

Angkor Wat is dedicated to Vishnu. It commemorates the Vishnuite King Suryavarman II who unified the Khmer royal house and kingdom in 1113 and reigned from then until about 1150. It is unclear exactly when the Angkor Wat bas-reliefs commemorating the life and accomplishments of Suryavarman II were done or who was responsible for them. Most of the work apparently was completed well before his death around 1150.

Some works of art—such as Rodin’s “The Thinker,” “Balzac,” and “Repentant Eve” (based on a pregnant model)—can be taken in at a glance and remembered for a lifetime.

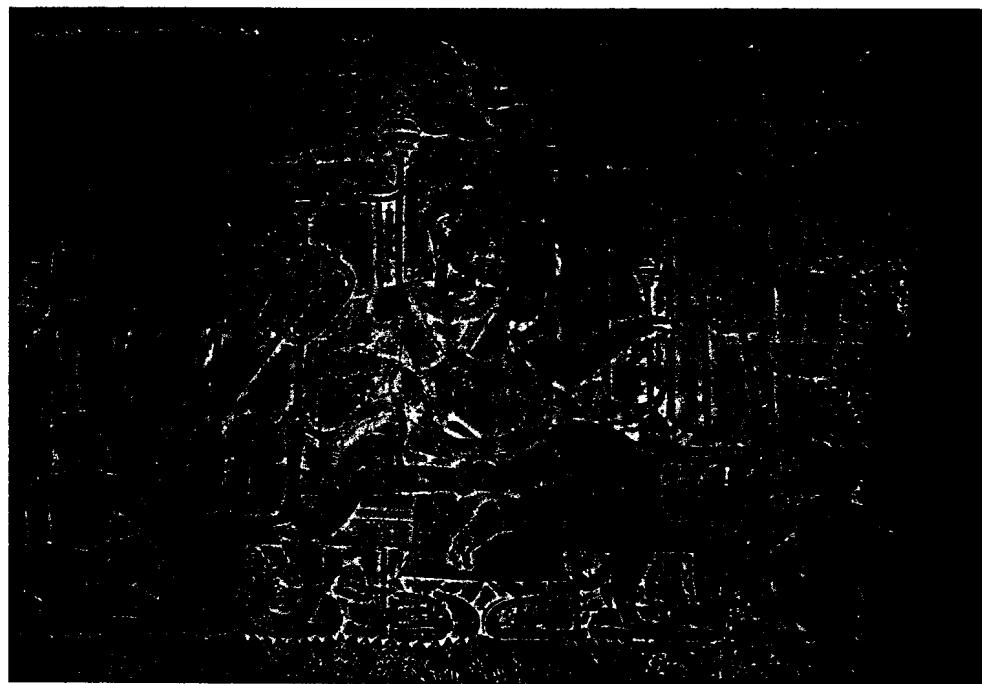


Figure 2. Suryavarman II addressing ministers (Angkor Wat, historical gallery of bas-reliefs, southern wall).



Figure 3. *Gajasimha* of Suryavarman II (Bayon, west portal). The inscription (not shown) including the posthumous name Paramavisnuloka is immediately behind the scribe in the lower right corner.



Figure 4. *Gajamatsya makara*. An imaginary or mythological fish with a snout like an elephant's trunk (Angkor Wat Churning). Note multi-headed naga held down by forepaw of *gajasimha*.

This is not so for the Angkor Wat Churning. No matter how many times you see it, or how long you have looked at it, there will be telling details that have escaped your attention. You may note the tiny crown on the head of Kurma, indicating that it is the King of Turtles. And you may also note the similar crowns on each of the heads of the naga Vasuki. But it might be some time before you notice that there is a second naga at the bottom of the scene (Fig. 5). This second naga was noted by BENISTI (1965, footnote on p. 107), who offered no explanation for its presence. The appearance of a second naga, while not obligatory, is characteristic of many Churning depictions. It is part of the Churning duality: two opposing teams, two flasks of *amritsa*, creation and destruction (O'FLAHERTY, 1975: 273). It may take several viewings before you note the details on Vasuki's breastplates and Kurma's carapace or the plethora of *gajasimha*.<sup>2</sup>

Suryavarman II (Fig. 2) was a devotee of Vishnu during his lifetime. At his cremation ceremony he was given the posthumous name "Paramavisnuloka," meaning "he who has gone to live in the land of Vishnu" (BRIGGS, 1951). His *gajasimha* (also known as

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<sup>2</sup>After a half-dozen viewings I still had not noticed that one of the two giant figures in the line of *deva* is obviously an *asura* (see MANNIKKA.. 1996: 164, fig. 5.37).



Figure 5. Vasuki and the second naga (Angkor Wat Churning). Note rows of identical *asura* on the left waiting their turn to participate in the churning and numerous *apsara* above right.



Figure 6. Poisoned fish (Angkor Wat Churning). Also present are crocodiles, a turtle, and *gajasimha*.

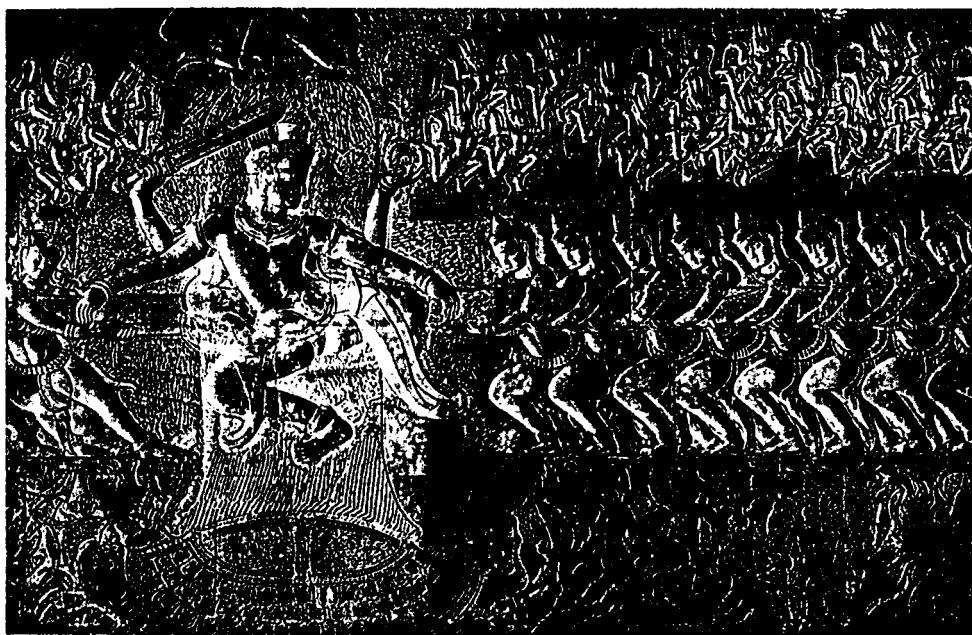


Figure 7. Fish cut in half by the sword of Vishnu or Suryavarman II (Angkor Wat Churning).

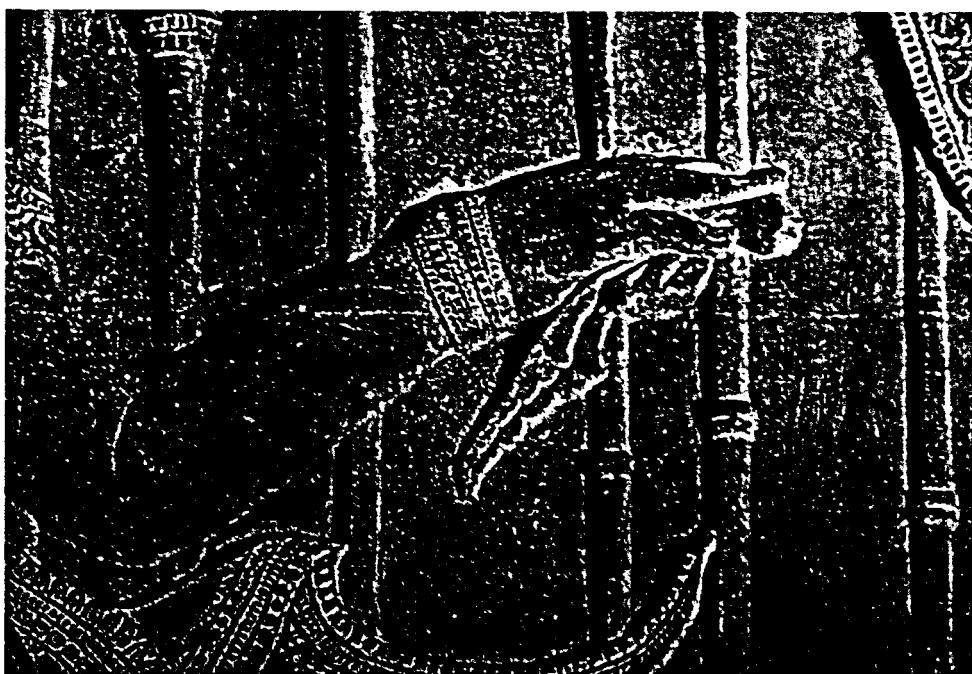


Figure 8. Strange object in Suryavarman II's left hand identified as a dagger in the shape of Garuda beak (see Fig. 2).

*kochasimha, kochasi and kulen*) is a *makara* combining features of lion, elephant, and naga (Fig. 3). Lion features of the *gajasmha* include the overall shape of head, body and limbs, and a stylized mane. Elephant features include a short trunk and sometimes short tusks. Naga features are limited to a series of transverse plates or scutes on the belly (comparable to the *gastrosteges* or transverse abdominal scales of most snakes) and cyclical scales on the body. Features present in Suryavarman II's *gajasmha* and apparently absent in earlier ones include a distinctively shaped head, much more lion- than elephant-like, and a beard. This kind of *gajasmha* is recognized here as symbolic of Suryavarman II's relationship to Vishnu. Many of the Angkor Wat bas-reliefs of battle scenes are dominated by *gajasmha*, some of them drawing war chariots. These scenes evidently are all related to Suryavarman II. Suryavarman II was also particularly identified with Vishnu sitting or standing on the shoulders of his mount Garuda. It is uncertain when identification of Suryavarman II with *gajasmha* and Garuda began but most likely it was soon after his coronation in 1113.

Most *makara* are based upon combinations of two or more real or mythological animals including but by no means limited to crocodiles, nagas, fishes, sharks, lions, elephants, swans, and eagles. Variations of *makara* are extensive, with no clear limits. Often they are combined with plants, notably lotus. As used here, the term refers to numerous beasts with cosmic creative and destructive qualities. Some of the earliest Indian representations of *makara* have foreparts of an elephant (including elephantine head, trunk, tusks, and forelimbs). The rest of the body is a carp or other scaled fish. Other popular Indian varieties have the foreparts of a lion and hindparts of a fish, or the foreparts of an elephant and hindparts of a lion, or a lion-like overall appearance with some elephant characteristics.

It is a matter of conjecture whether fishes included in *makara* represent the Vishnu avatar Matsya. Snake-like ventral plates often are present on the belly in such Indian *makara*, but the snake- or fish-like scales invariably present in Suryavarman II's *makara* usually are absent. *Makara* combining elephant and lion characteristics (regardless of other characteristics) are called "gajasmha". India also has *gajamatsya*, with elephant foreparts and fish hindparts. Elephant foreparts may consist of the head and forelimbs or just the head. The fish hind-parts often are covered with scales. When the head of a *makara* is prominently displayed swallowing or disgorging a part of the cosmic reality from its gaping mouth it is referred to as a *kurtimukha*.

The open-mouthed *makara-kurtimukha* is one of the most pervasive and significant motifs in Hindu and Buddhist art. It is widely distributed in India, Nepal, Tibet, Cambodia, Laos, and Thailand. It can occur on virtually any opening, portal, or entryway that can be represented metaphorically as a mouth. It is commonly found as an integral part of the design of gables, windows, portals, and niches of temples. Decorated art pieces, musical instruments, crowns of royalty, masks of dancers and entertainers (including Thai *khon* masks), sheaths of knives and other weapons (including Hindu daggers and knives related to the Malayan *kris*), and the mouths of guns including pistols, rifles, and cannons also display this motif. Upon entering and departing via the *makara-kurtimukha* portal of a Cambodian Hindu or Buddhist temple one is metaphorically being swallowed and then regurgitated by the *makara*. Many Hindu and Buddhist temples, including Banteay Srei in Cambodia and Borobodur in Java, have nested series of *makara-kurtimukha*. Passing through such a series symbolizes attaining progressively higher states of wisdom, enlightenment or being. Everything in creation may be swallowed and regurgitated by the *makara* and their *kurtimukha*.

One kind of elephant-fish *makara* or *gajamatsya* resembles an ordinary scaled fish (typically a carp) except for having a more or less elongated snout like an elephant trunk. Relatively rare in India, this *gajamatsya* is abundantly represented in the Angkor Wat Churning (Fig. 4). A few representations also are present in Bayon and Banteay Chhmar bas-reliefs. Significance of *gajamatsya* in Angkorean Khmer iconography is as yet unknown but is likely to involve Suryavarman II.

A “Churning of the Sea of Milk” is likely but not necessarily to be found on any of the ancient Khmer temples. A detailed example on the Bayon, unfortunately badly damaged, is nevertheless of interest here. Other Khmer churning bas-reliefs occur at Banteay Srei, Banteay Samre, Beng Mealea, Chi Sou, Prasat Banan near Battambang, and Wat Preah Vihear in the Dangrek Mountains near the Thai border.

A small version of the Churning is present in the Southwest Corner Pavilion of Angkor Wat. It differs in numerous respects from the large Angkor Wat Churning bas-relief but is badly damaged. Among the differences is the presence of Surya or Chandra as a disc of the sun or the moon. Originally both were presumably present but one has been entirely eroded away. Elegant wavy lines indicate water. The only other Angkorean bas-relief with water similarly indicated apparently is the nearby “Fête nautique des Dvaravati”, also in the Southwest Corner Pavilion of Angkor Wat (see below). This “wavy line” effect is absent in Bayon bas-reliefs including the Churning.

Originating in India in the era before Christ, the Churning myth evidently reached Cambodia by the sixth century AD. A simple version decorates a lintel recently found at Angkor Borei and now in the Angkor Borei Museum. This lintel, which is about 1.3 m long by 40 cm high, and in perfect condition, has the basic elements of a Churning scene, with the naga Vasuki, a Vishnu-Mandara-Kurma centerpiece, and Sugriva holding up Vasuki’s tail. There are ten fish in the Sea of Milk, most of them carps (Cyprinidae), and one a perch-eel or swamp-eel (Synbranchidae). The flood plains of Angkor Borei are inhabited by two species of swamp-eels, *Monopterus javanensis* and *Ophisternon bengalense*.

The distinguishing character of the post-Vedic Vishnu is his willingness to allow a portion of his essence to become incarnate on ten principal occasions, each time in order to deliver mankind from grave danger (MONIER-WILLIAMS, 1899: 999), hence the ten principal reincarnations or avatars of Vishnu. All of the avatars manifested themselves in order to correct some great evil or accomplish some great good in the world, as in the Churning of the Sea of Milk to produce *amrita* or the elixir of immortality.

Told in the *Mahabharata* and *Bhagavad Purana*, this myth recounts that long ago the *deva* and the *asura*, representing the gods and anti-gods or the forces of good and evil in the world, fought for one thousand years in an effort to obtain the *amrita*. Tiring of the long struggle, the *deva* petitioned Vishnu for help. Vishnu commanded them not to struggle against the *asura* but to cooperate with them. The *deva* and *asura* organized themselves into two teams, one for each half of a long rope with its middle twisted around Mount Mandara in the middle of the sea. As they alternatively pushed and pulled the rope around and around the mountain, churning the sea, the mountain suddenly began to sink into the earth. Vishnu saw that he had to intervene.

At Vishnu’s bidding, Vasuki, king of the nagas or divine serpents, appeared and wound his middle around Mount Mandara to facilitate the churning. Vishnu’s tortoise incarnation Kurma supported Mount Mandara on its back to prevent it from sinking. Vishnu directed the efforts from the top of Mount Mandara. The *asura*, with Bali or

Ravana holding the naga king's head, took Vasuki's anterior part. The *deva* took Vasuki's posterior part, with the monkey king Sugriva holding up the tail. When everyone had taken their places they started pushing Vasuki's body around and around Mandara. They churned for a thousand years. This time the churning was so violent that it turned the sea into milk. The milk was produced by Surabhi, the cow of plenty or "fountain of milk and curd", who granted humans their every desire. *Apsara* or heavenly nymphs appeared in numbers, as well as the god Indra and goddess Lakshmi (consort of Vishnu, goddess of wealth and good fortune), the white elephant Airvata (*vahana* or vehicle of Indra), and the white horse Uccaishrava (also sacred to Indra).

Nauseated by the churning, Vasuki vomited his venom into the Sea of Milk, thus threatening to destroy all living things. Vishnu's reincarnation Krishna came to the rescue by swallowing the venom, which turned his neck blue. Finally the *amrita* appeared. Although this detail is not depicted in the Angkor Wat Churning, a pair of urns for the precious substance are shown in the representation of the Churning in the lower gallery of the northern wing of the West gallery of the Bayon (ROVEDA, 2000). Later the *deva* and the *asura* will struggle for control of the *amrita*. According to some accounts of the Churning, the production of Vasuki's venom or "*hālāhala*" is a necessary evil to counterbalance the production of *amrita* (O'FLAHERTY, 1975: 273).

Such is the mythical story of the Churning. The Angkor Wat Churning can also be interpreted in a literal or naturalistic level. The fish in the scene are notable not only for their great number and diversity of kinds, but also for their attitudes and behavior. We see precisely what happens when fish in a river are poisoned (Figs. 5–6). The artists who crafted the Angkor Wat Churning must have fished with poison or watched while it was done. Their depiction of poisoned fish and other animals fits in well with the part of the myth where Vasuki's vomit poisons the Sea of Milk. Apparently no one has previously commented upon this aspect of the Angkor Wat Churning scene. The poisoning leitmotif is not evident in other Khmer Churning bas-reliefs seen by me.

Fish poisoning has been practiced for centuries and probably for millennia by forest peoples throughout the tropics, presumably including ancient Cambodia. One of the organic chemical substances most commonly employed is rotenone. Important plant sources include the Asian genus *Derris* (Leguminosae, Papilionoideae). Since rotenone suffocates fish by interfering with the function of their gills, the fish killed by it are edible.

Several modern writers report that the fish and other animals in the Angkor Wat Churning are being "torn apart by the force of the churning." A closer look shows that this is not true. The fish are being cut in two by Vishnu's sword (Fig. 7). The fish just in front of and below his sword arm are cut neatly in half, with the pieces still close together and still aligned (the sword is very sharp). As the distance of the cut fish away from Vishnu increases, the pieces become further separated and their orientation to each other is increasingly haphazard. Cutting of fish and other animals in two, perhaps first depicted in the Angkor Wat Churning, is also seen in the Bayon bas-relief of the Churning.

Why are fish and other animals in the Angkor Wat Churning being cut by Vishnu's sword? The answer might be that the scene depicts Suryavarman II in the role of Vishnu. The warrior king's prowess with the sword and many other weapons is commemorated in numerous Angkor Wat bas-reliefs especially in the Battle of Kurukshetra. On a higher metaphysical plane, cutting of a fish in half by Vishnu symbolizes division of Creation into ages or *yuga*.

If we look at the fish for the first 1–1.5 meters at the extreme left end of the Sea of Milk, immediately below Vasuki's heads, they seem to be swimming upstream in perfectly good health. Some are near the surface, some in mid-water or near the bottom, and all are in normal swimming positions (mostly horizontal, or but slightly inclined one way or another); none of them is dead, dying, or even in trouble. They are not crowding the surface or gulping for air. All but one of them is swimming forward. The single fish farthest forward is swimming in the opposite direction, as if blocked by Vasuki's body, but otherwise it appears to be behaving normally.

At about two m from the snake's head, we see a fish near the surface with its head up, as if trying to get air, and many fish in mid-water oriented almost vertically upwards. The 17th fish on the bottom looks like a tongue-sole (*Cynoglossus*), a typical bottom-living fish. In the upper row of fish the first fish clearly oriented to the surface is no.12; fish 17–20 are all oriented to the surface and appear to be gulping for air. Fish no. 31 in the row of fish on the bottom is the first fish there that is upside down, either dead or dying or at least immobilized. Fish 25–26 and 28–31 in the uppermost row and three fish immediately below them are all tongue soles. The unusual presence of these nine fish at the surface would only occur if they had been forced there by deoxygenation or poisoning of their bottom habitat. Bottom fish 25 appears to be a flatfish (Soleidae), 29 a featherfin (Notopteridae), and 30 a sawfish (Pristidae). In this area are a large crab and thirteen prawns (*Macrobrachium*). Some prawns on the bottom and some prawns and a turtle in the middle of the water column are upside down as if poisoned.

About 10 m into the scene and 9 m from the central Vishnu figure, quite a few large fish are upside down in the middle of the water column and a crocodile is upside down near the surface. Near the Vishnu are many fish and crocodiles upside down or oblique, obviously dead or dying. About 2–3 m in front of and just below Vishnu we see the greatest proportion of distressed and upside down fish, and many fish, crocodiles, and *gajasimha* cut in two by his sword. Fish neatly cut in half and the pieces not yet floated apart occur at sword-arm's length about 1 m behind Vishnu. Some 6–7 m in front of Sugriva we see about 25 fish in a row orienting obliquely with heads at the surface gulping for air. Immediately below this group are several dead or dying fish lying upside down.

One of the most striking features of the Angkor Wat Churning seems to have passed virtually unnoticed. All of the *asura* have identical bodies with identical clothing and identical faces with a distinctive mustache. While the faces of the *deva* lack moustaches and differ in their expression from those of the *asura*, they are similar enough to represent the same person. It seems that the faces of all of the 200-odd figures involved in pulling and pushing Vasuki's body, with the exception of the monkey Sugriva, are based upon the same human model. Apparently no explanation has been offered previously to explain this.

The hypothesis favored here is that the face is a likeness of Suryavarman II. It is similar to that identified in other Angkor Wat bas-reliefs (Fig. 2) and other artifacts tentatively identified here as realistic or life-like representations of Suryavarman II (including the highly realistic West Mebon bronze Vishnu). This is also in keeping with the hypothesis that Suryavarman II is represented in numerous other bas-reliefs of Angkor Wat. If the general hypothesis is correct, Suryavarman II may appear as himself; as Vishnu; as various symbols of Vishnu including Garuda (often depicted in semi-human form); and as other gods, demi-gods, or heroic humans (such as the leader of the Pandavas in the Battle of Kurukshetra).

Numerous previously unidentified statues from temples of diverse dates throughout Cambodia probably are realistic depictions of Suryavarman II, including heads of Vishnu and Shiva from Prasat Bakong. Other statues and heads identified by me as probable life-like representations Suryavarman II are from the Bakheng, Phnom Bok, Neak Ta of Phnom Kulen, Prasat Thom, Wat Baset, Prah Ko, Koh Ker, and other temples. These vary in the date assigned to them by various authors from the seventh to the mid-thirteenth centuries. They all have one important thing in common: the faces look like they belong to one and the same person. In many instances the very same face has been copied in different statues representing different gods. Features usually present include a thin upturned moustache, a continuous eyebrow uninterrupted by the bridge of the nose, and a close-trimmed beard in an unusual inverted V-shape at the chin. The beard is particularly distinctive.

One intriguing statue has until now been identified only as that of "a feminine deity." This statue with complete torso and head with its two arms broken off, one at the shoulder and one at the elbow, is displayed next to other statues identified here with Suryavarman II in the most prominent place in the display of Khmer artifacts in the Musée Guimet. Its femininity is indicated by well-developed breasts. Nevertheless the face is clearly that of a man, as indicated by the moustache and otherwise masculine appearance. The author hypothesizes that the statue represents Suryavarman II in the guise of the Shakti or feminine essence of Shiva Nataraj. This is Shiva dancing the cosmic creation. The particular dance position, with the knees bent and the feet spread apart and planted firmly upon the ground, is one of the 108 classical dance poses of Shiva Nataraj. The pose may represent Suryavarman II's dominion over the two Khmer kingdoms that he unified into one, and the consequent peace and prosperity this brought. The statue, MG 18096, was found at Koh Ker or Prasat Thom in Kompong Thom province, Cambodia.

The name "Shakti" supposedly originates from the sound *sh*, meaning welfare or prosperity, and *kti*, meaning prowess. Hence Shakti means She who is the embodiment of prosperity and prowess. Shakti may be taken to mean Bhagavati and Parvati. Bhagavati, Shakti, Ambika, and Parvati are manifestations of Shakti, the *devi* or goddess coexisting in all *deva* or male gods. Each *devi* possesses the vehicle, ornaments and other attributes of her *deva*. Hence Brahmani or Sarasvati, wife of Brahma, rides on the goose Hamsa, wears the beads of contemplation and learning around her neck, and holds a sacred water vessel in her hands. Vishnu's Shakti rides Garuda and so on (MANI., 1975: 668).

The author feels that the hypothetical identification offered here is a good one. Rather than the vague hypothesis of a statue representing "a feminine deity" but otherwise lacking in meaning, we have an hypothesis rich in historical and mythological associations. Readers might object that this hypothesis is impossible to test (in the sense of the epistemological philosopher Thomas Kuhn) based on the statue itself, an assessment with which the author concurs. It can be tested by finding the missing arms and seeing whether they have the attributes of Shiva. It can be tested also by searching for relevant inscriptions or epigraphs related to this statue, and by finding similar statues representing Suryavarman II in temples otherwise associated with him. Such research may be greatly facilitated by computerized technology and data banks. Researchers are welcome to propose alternative hypotheses concerning this enigmatic and possibly unique statue. Sometimes the best thing about an hypothesis is that it stimulates other researchers to come up with a better one.

If the poisoning depicted in the Angkor Wat Churning is taken at face value, the ancient Khmers had a poison that killed or numbed not only fishes, but also prawns, crabs,

turtles, crocodiles, nagas, and *gajasimha*. It seems unlikely that the poison or poisons actually used was cobra or any other kind of animal venom. Most likely it was obtained from plants, of which many kinds produce substances that will kill fishes when released into the water, but few (if any) that will kill air-breathing reptiles as well. Whether plant substances can kill nagas and *gajasimha* is unknown.

The Vedic term *amrita* was in earlier times given to various things offered in sacrifice, but more especially the *soma* juice. In later times it is the water of life or elixir of immortality produced at the conclusion of the Churning of the Sea of Milk. Two amphora-like flasks for containing the *amrita* have been identified in the Bayon churning (Bayon western gallery, northern wing, lower gallery; ROVEDA, 2000: 147, fig. 224).

In addition to fishes, crabs, turtles, prawns and crocodiles, the “sea of milk” in the Angkor Wat Churning has generous numbers of mythical creatures. These are of three kinds: 1) young or juvenile naga (divine cobras); 2) fish with short snouts similar to an elephant trunk, *gajamatsya*; and 3) lion-like *makara* with short snouts similar to an elephant trunk, *gajasimha*. *Gajasimha* apparently are not represented in any other Khmer bas-reliefs of the Churning. Their presence in the Angkor Wat Churning surely is related to the reign and persona of Suryavarman II. “*Gajamatsya*” is a neo-Sanskrit term proposed here, based on the Sanskrit words “*gaja*” for elephant and “*matsya*” for fish. Matsya or Manu is the first incarnation or avatar of Vishnu.

A long series of Angkor Wat battle-scene bas-reliefs is dominated by *gajasimha* (ANON., 1932). Over 20 *gajasimha* are seen drawing war chariots. A few are engaged in hand-to-hand combat. Some of these scenes possibly represent Khmer mythological innovations with no equivalent elsewhere. Others represent incidents from the *Mahabharata*, *Ramayana* and other epic literature in which Suryavarman II is depicted in the guises of various gods and heroes. While Hinduism is polytheistic, it is also essentially monotheistic or monistic (BHATTACHARYA, 1997: 37–38). All of the many Hindu gods (350 million of them according to some accounts) are really aspects or emanations of one god. We see Suryavarman II as Agni, god of fire (mounted on a rhinoceros); Surya, the sun god (on a chariot drawn by horses); Brahma (on the goose Hamsa); Indra, god of thunder, (on the three-headed white elephant Airvata); Vishnu (on Garuda); Skanda, god of war (on a peacock); Varuna, god of water (on a naga); Rama (in an archery contest); and perhaps even Yama, god of judgment (on a chariot drawn by buffaloes). He appears as well in the guise of sundry other gods and heroes, some of them unidentified. He is often depicted exhibiting his prowess with weapons, as in the Battle of Kurukshetra and the Churning of the Sea of Milk.

One striking scene depicts Vishnu mounted on Garuda holding two decapitated heads of *gajasimha* (ANON., 1932, pl. 384). This scene perhaps refers to Suryavarman II’s defeat of his great uncle Dharamindravarman I in 1113 and to his earlier defeat of a descendant of King Harshavarman III. The latter rival’s name has not been recorded but the family of Harshavarman III was a traditional enemy of the family of Suryavarman II. Leaping upon his opponent’s elephant, Suryavarman II killed him “just as the eagle Garuda takes a snake in its talons” (inscription of Ban Theat; FINOT, 1912; BRIGGS, 1951; HIGHAM, 2001).

Another Khmer iconographic innovation that may be related to Suryavarman II is the depiction of Garuda holding up two slain nagas by their tails. The scene is depicted in bas-reliefs of various Khmer and Thai temples. Black and white glazed ceramic finials or *chofa* with this motif were produced during the Sukhothai period in Thailand.

The famous scene of Suryavarman II on his throne shows him holding a dead snake in his right hand<sup>3</sup>. The triangular-shaped head suggests that the snake is a viper<sup>4</sup>. The snake presumably represents either Dharanindravarman I or the descendent of Hashavarman III. The object in Suryavarman II's left hand (Fig. 8), previously unidentified (HIGHAM, 2000: 116), might be the weapon with which he dispatched his foe, perhaps a dagger in the shape of Garuda's beak.

Garuda's beak has been portrayed in many ways, and some of the portrayals do not resemble the crenulated shape of the blade of the supposed dagger in Suryavarman II's hand. Its shape, however, is quite similar to that in some Angkor Wat bas-reliefs. One such bas-relief is in the third gallery, east side, north half, in the battle of Vishnu with the *asura* (MANNIKKA, 2000, fig. 6.1). This Garuda beak is shown as strongly concave internally, as in bird beaks generally. Another Garuda with a similar beak has a four-armed Vishnu (Suryavarman II?) standing on its shoulders. This is in the Northwest Pavilion of Angkor Wat (GROSLIER, 1925: pl. 80).

At about the time Angkor Wat was built Khmer bas-reliefs of Vishnu in the *Anantasayin* attitude start showing Vishnu reclining on a *gajasimha* or *kulen* with an elongated body.<sup>5</sup> The naga Ananta or Sesha is depicted either underneath the *gajasimha* or in the background. Such an innovation, in Cambodia narrowly associated with Suryavarman II, is apparently unknown in India, Indonesia, and Vietnam. Appearance of the *gajasimha* with Vishnu lying on its back and dreaming the cosmic dream as they float on the Sea of Milk evidently is related to Suryavarman II, as is the prevalence of *gajasimha* in the Angkor Wat depiction of the Churning.

#### “FÊTE NAUTIQUE DES DVARAVATI” Figures 9–11

The “Fête nautique des Dvaravati” (Figs. 9–11) in the Southwest Corner Pavilion of Angkor Wat, identified as such by GLAIZE, 1948 and GROSLIER, 1956, is at the same time one of the most skillfully executed, engaging, and beautiful of all Angkorean bas-reliefs. Occupying a wall in the Corner Pavilion, it is extremely rich in composition and attention to fine details. High forest and fish-filled waters in the foreground and background, of many incidental elements, and of the variety of arboreal, terrestrial, and aquatic vertebrate life forms enrich the scene. The beautifully executed “wavy” pattern of the waters elsewhere is observed only in the near-by small version of the Churning of the Sea of Milk on another wall in the Southwest Corner Pavilion.

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<sup>3</sup>This is one of two Angkor Wat bas-reliefs identified with some confidence as a representation of Suryavarman II because it includes an ancient Khmer inscription with the Suryavarman II's posthumous name Paramavishnuloka (COEDÈS, 1911).

<sup>4</sup>Perhaps the small leaf-green “white-lipped viper”, *Trimeresurus albolabis*.

<sup>5</sup>For photographic illustrations see BENISTI, 1965, figs. 12–14, 17–21; JESSUP & ZÉPHIR, 1997: 267; JACQUES & FREEMAN, 2000: 48, 196; AND ROVEDA, 2000: 43, 128.



Figure 9. "Fête nautique des Dvaravati" (Angkor Wat, southwest pavilion). Photograph copyright EFEO.

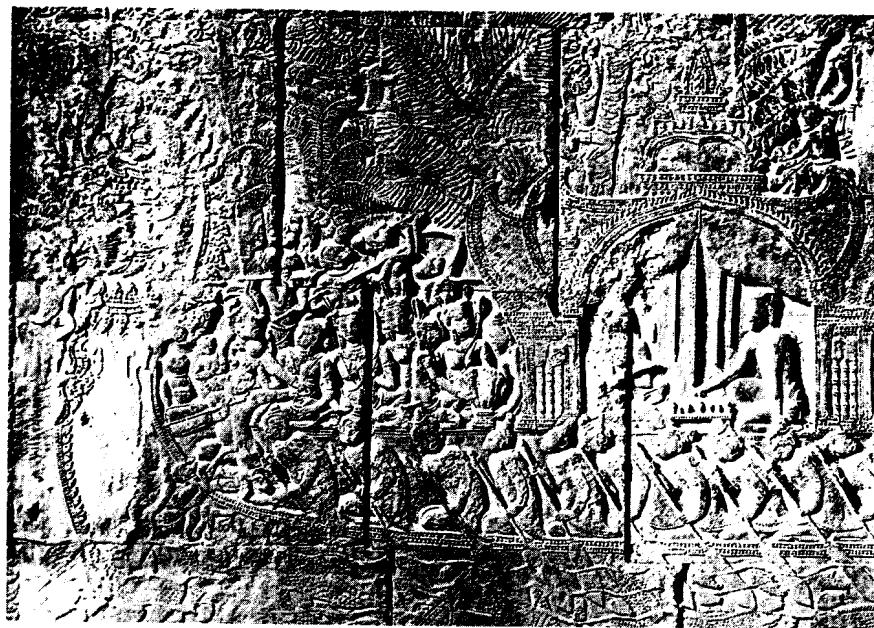


Figure 10. "Fête nautique des Dvaravati" detail of upper pleasure boat. Highly ornamented (albeit damaged) gajasimha on the prow indicates this is a royal pleasure boat of Suryavarman II. The male chess player presumably is Suryavarman II. Note hunters with blow guns, one of whom has just hit a large forest bird. Photograph copyright EFEO.



Figure 11. "Fête nautique des Dvaravati" detail of lower pleasure boat. Note cock-fight and boy at bow of boat who has speared or gigged a fish. This cock-fight scene should be compared with the one in a Bayon bas-relief (Fig. 30). Photograph copyright EFEO.

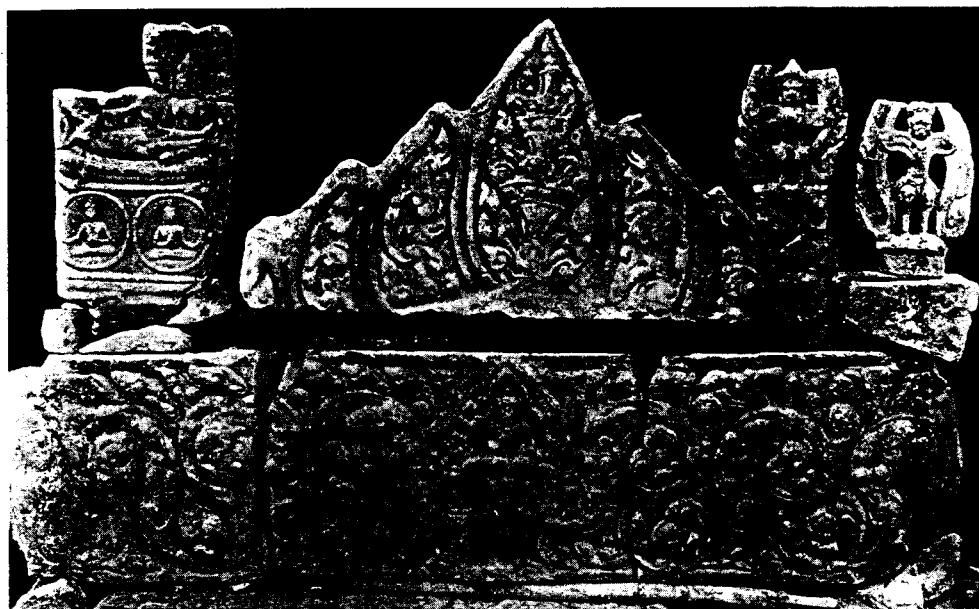


Figure 12. Vishnuite lintel, West Mebon temple. Vishnu reclining on *gajasimha* (upper left) pair of standing Garuda (upper right); and Indra on white elephant Airvata (lower center). Photograph copyright EFEO.



Figure 13. Vishnu reclining on *gajasimha* (Vishnuite lintel detail, West Mebon temple). Although its head is missing, the figure on which Vishnu reclines is clearly the tetrapod *gajasimha* and not a naga. The unusual left-right orientation of the Vishnu is the same as that of the West Mebon bronze of a reclining Vishnu. Photograph copyright EFEO.

This bas-relief presages and in some respects surpasses the wonderfully humanistic Khmer bas-reliefs of the Bayon. Possibly it was executed at a relatively late date and does not actually pre-date the Bayon bas-reliefs. Supposing that it does predate them, it may have played an important role in the development of bas-relief art that reached its climax in the Bayon. Most specifically, the cock-fighting scene in lower right hand corner of the Angkor Wat “*Fête nautique*” scene has been compared to a superficially similar cock-fighting scene in the Bayon. The two royal boats of the *Fête nautique* may also be compared to the Bayon bas-relief of a boat carrying a group of Chinese. While the similarities are obvious, important differences are numerous. While the Angkor Wat “*Fête nautique des Dvaravati*” bas-relief may have inspired the makers of the Bayon bas-reliefs, they did not slavishly copy from it.

Perhaps the most outstanding feature of the entire bas-relief, and the one to which the viewer's eye is strongly drawn, is the couple playing chess in the upper royal boat (Fig. 10). The highly ornamented *gajasimha* on the prow of the boat suggests that it was the personal pleasure craft of Suryavarman II. *Gajasimha* have not been identified on the prow of any boats depicted elsewhere in Angkor Wat, or in any of the numerous boats depicted in bas-reliefs on the Bayon.

A small group of hunters using blowguns to bring down birds is seen to the viewer's left-hand of the upper boat (Fig. 11). One man is holding a blowgun to his side, while the other is blowing on his gun lined up with a large pigeon-like bird that has just been shot. A small man in front of him appears to be holding a dart. This is perhaps the only Angkor Wat bas-relief in which this kind of hunting activity is depicted. Hunting birds with blowguns is also featured in one of the Bayon bas-reliefs (Colin Poole, pers. comm., August 2002).

#### SURYAVARMAN II'S GAJASIMHA

Figures 3, 12–13, 21

In the [Khmer] 12<sup>th</sup> century the naga Ananta is transformed into a dragon. We observe this phenomenon for the first time in monuments constructed after Angkor Wat, for example at Banteay Samre and Beng Melea. One should perhaps not search for an explanation in Chinese influence. It is probably an indigenous ('autochthonic') tradition. The transformation was natural, since the naga and the dragon have the same symbolic significance: both represent the primordial waters or sea

KAMALESWAR BHATTACHARYA, 1961: 110 (author's translation)

In Indian and earlier Khmer bas-reliefs, Vishnu Anantasayin is portrayed reclining on the naga Ananta or Sesha. Often he is shown giving birth to Brahma via an umbilicus-like lotus extending from his navel. The earliest Indian bas-reliefs of Vishnu Anantasayin date from about the fifth century AD. The date of the earliest Khmer Vishnu Anantasayin is unknown, but probably for four or five centuries or longer Khmer depictions of the scene invariably showed Vishnu reclining on the naga.

Several bas-reliefs depict Vishnu Reclining on the Sea of Milk in the “River of a Thousand *Linga*” at the sacred mountain at Kbal Spean and in the identically named “River of a Thousand *Linga*” on the sacred mountain of Phnom Kulen. All of them show Vishnu reclining on a naga. The significance of these reclining Vishnu images is evident. In dreaming on the Sea of Milk, Vishnu must first dream the Sea of Milk itself into

existence. Relevant here is the Vedic belief that “the Creator’s first creation was water” (JOHNSON, 2000: 5). For the ancient Khmer who placed these Vishnu images in the sources of Phnom Kulen this was not a matter of some remote mythological event, but rather a continuous act of creation necessary to insure the continued supply of water to the Angkorean civilization on the plains below. There are at least six such reclining Vishnu (Vishnu Anantasayin or Vishnu Narai) at Kbal Spean and three or four on Phnom Kulen. The sculptors made considerable efforts to reach remote sources of these rivers. It is likely that additional “Vishnu reclining on the Sea of Milk” bas-reliefs remain to be discovered in these mountain redoubts.

In later Khmer bas-reliefs Vishnu is shown reclining on a *gajasimha*. The naga may be shown in the bas-relief, underneath, behind, or to one side of the *gajasimha*, or it may be absent. The *gajasimha* has forelimbs and hindlimbs and a single lion-like head with large teeth, a short snout like an elephant’s trunk, and a beard. Its body is lengthened to accommodate Vishnu’s reclining figure. In some depictions it is shown pushing the naga away or holding it down with its paw. The earliest of such representations apparently are contemporary with the building or ornamentation of Angkor Wat. In a number of instances they have been installed on earlier temples

Numerous *gajasimha* are displayed in the Angkor Wat Churning. So far as I am aware this is unique for a Churning scene. My first thought upon realizing this was that it might have something to do with Suryavarman II, builder of Angkor Wat. All of my relevant observations made since then indicate the connection is real.

Elongate *gajasimha* can be identified in several Khmer Anantasayin bas-reliefs in Thailand. Most famous of these is the “Narai Taplong” lintel from Prasat Phnom Rung (SMITTHI ET AL., 1992: 288–289). There is also a sitting Kubera (guardian deity of the northern direction) on a *gajasimha* (ibid., 298) and a lintel from Prasat Pimai depicting a boat on a lotus pond with *gajasimha* (ibid., 250–251).

In the Narai Taplong and Kubera lintels the *gajasimha* are elongated to accommodate the figures reclining on them. In the Narai Taplong a naga is also present between Vishnu and the *gajasimha*, but the *gajasimha* is larger and more prominent; the two are obviously separate. In the Kubera lintel, only the *gajasimha* is present. The Prasat Phimai lintel includes a delightful scene, unfortunately damaged, of a boat with a central seated figure, badly damaged (Lakshmi?), and seven rowers on a lotus-filled pond. Below each end of the boat is a *gajasimha*.

Resemblance of the Thailand’s Narai Taplong and Kubera *gajasimha* was noted by SMITTHI ET AL., 1992: 298), who referred to them as *simha* (lions) or dragons rather than *gajasimha*. Unlike *simha*, *gajasimha* are often associated with water (as in the Angkor Wat Churning). Khmer *simha* often lack the snake-like plates on the belly and scales on the rest of the body that are invariably present on *gajasimha* associated with Suryavarman II. Suryavarman II is mentioned in a Phnom Rung genealogical inscription (HIGHAM, 2001: 114).

The problematic term “dragon” embraces a great variety of historically and mythologically unrelated imaginary creatures. Researchers should try to use more specific terms instead of dragon, including proper names if such are known and can be attached with confidence to the object of study. My efforts to find a proper name for Suryavarman II’s *gajasimha* have been unsuccessful. Use of the generic term *gajasimha* (alternative spelling *gajasinha*), however, is not in doubt, since its predominant characteristics are

those of elephant and lion, and since at least some Indian versions also include snake scales on the body.

Photographs of a number of Khmer reclining Vishnu bas-reliefs are brought together by BENISTI (1965). These include depictions in which Vishnu is reclining on a naga only (Figs. 1–9); on both a naga and a *gajasimha* (Figs. 12–14, 18); or on just a *gajasimha* (Figs. 17, 19–21). Her report was commented upon by BHATTACHARYA (1966). Benisti writes of Vishnu lying on “un grand animal à pattes griffues, à gueule garni de dents ou de crocs, ample crinière et trompe nasal et au long corps couvert d’écailles.” Although they give the naga both of its proper names, Ananta and Sesha, Benisti and Bhattacharya do not identify this other mythological animal as a *gajasimha*, nor do they give its proper name. This *gajasimha* has not previously been identified with the *gajasimha* in the Angkor Wat Churning of the Sea of Milk.

According to Benisti in monuments after Angkor Wat including those in the style of the Bayon, all representations of Vishnu reclining present the “dragon” [our “*gajasimha*”] while the naga [Ananta or Sesha] tends to disappear (BENISTI, 1965: 101, Figs. 12–14). Depiction of Vishnu reclining on a *gajasimha* seems to be a Khmer innovation that made its earliest appearance during the reign of Suryavarman II. The proper name of this *gajasimha* is therefore to be sought in contemporaneous Khmer epigraphy. Since it coexisted for some time with the naga, its name is unlikely to be either Ananta or Sesha, names belonging to the Anantasayin naga before the introduction of Vishnu to Cambodia.

During the Bayon period the naga balustrade that is such a prominent feature in all periods of Angkorean art and architecture underwent a profound metamorphosis (STERN, 1965: 35–37; JESSUP & ZÉPHIR, 1997: 284). The multi-headed naga of the earlier style was replaced by a totally new and much more complicated representation. This often consists of a new Garuda centerpiece and a base consisting of a three-headed naga. The heads on each side of the Garuda are mainly or entirely *gajasimha* (although not previously recognized as such). Garuda balustrades surround the precincts of the Bayon and occur in numerous other Angkorean sites. There are numerous innovations involving size, number, and placement of *gajasimha*, form and posture of Garuda, and so on.

Did the modern Khmer name Phnom Kulen for the sacred mountains northeast of Angkor have its origin in Suryavarman II’s *gajasimha* or *kulen*? Modern Khmers say the name comes from the *kulen* fruit that is abundant in the mountains (Long Seam, pers. comm., May 2001). But perhaps this only begs the question: how did the *kulen* fruit of Phnom Kulen get its name if not from the *gajasimha*? *Kulen* fruit are also called “leetchee” (Bruno Degens, *in litt.*, 22 Nov. 2001).

#### THE WEST MEBON VISHNU

In 1936 an excavation of West Mebon Island in the center of the Western Baray by Maurice Glaize yielded portions of a bronze reclining Vishnu with an estimated total length of 4–6 m. The bronze is assigned to the early Bayon period. The single largest piece recovered is a nearly complete bust of a four-armed Vishnu on display in the Phnom Penh Museum. The face including its moustache, bracelets, armlets, and elaborate pectoral or gorgette recall those in Angkor Wat bas-reliefs of Suryavarman II (unfortunately the crown is missing). If this reclining Vishnu does represent Suryavarman II then it probably depicted Vishnu reclining on the back of a *gajasimha*.

This hypothesis should not be difficult to test: *Ex pede Herculem...* ("from the foot alone Hercules may be recognized..."). A number of smaller bronze pieces of the West Mebon Vishnu were recovered in 1936, and it is possible that more remain at the site. Those recovered thus far apparently do not include any diagnostic parts of a *gajasimha*. Diagnostic parts of *gajasimha* include the tetrapod limbs, paws with claws, and the elephant-like trunk.

Evidence supporting the hypotheses that 1) the West Mebon reclining Vishnu is lying on a *gajasimha*, and that 2) the Vishnu also represents Suryavarman II is provided by a Vishnuite bas-relief from the West Mebon temple (Figs. 12–13). The bas-relief was found on the North tower of the East face of the temple by GLAIZE in 1936. Broken in several pieces, it includes a) two Garuda, b) Indra on his elephant mount, and c) Vishnu reclining on an elongate tetrapod *gajasimha* (Fig. 12). This Vishnuite lintel evidently represents an artistic tradition different from that of the still-standing parts of the exterior wall of the West Mebon decorated with bas-reliefs of the Baphuon style.

The *gajasimha* of the West Mebon lintel (Fig. 13) has fore-limbs and hind-limbs and probably only a single head. No naga is visible; the part of the bas-relief where it would be is missing. Beneath the *gajasimha* is a pair of figures with crossed legs and outstretched arms each inside a circle or disc. The circled figures are each other's mirror image. Such symbols represent the sun and the moon, Surya and Chandra, or in this instance presumably Suryavarman II. Inclusion of symbols for Surya and Chandra in Churning depictions occurs much earlier in India and in Cambodia and is by no means unique to the Angkor Wat period of Suryavarman II. Similar pairs of sun and moon figures are present on small bas-reliefs of the Churning of the Sea of Milk from Prasat Phnom Da, Takeo province, Cambodia Angkor Wat (Musée Guimet MG 17860), Prasat Phnom Chi Sou in Takeo province (pers. obs., August 2002), and other Angkorean Churning bas-reliefs (Claude Jacques, pers. comm., April 2002).

Identification of figures inside the disc of the sun in the West Mebon Vishnuite *gajasimha* bas-relief as Suryavarman II is based upon assumptions or hypotheses concerning historical context or associations. The figures themselves do not include attributes or details of dress supporting this identification.

On the Northwest Pavilion of the eastern branch of the north wall of Angkor Wat there is a splendid detailed bas-relief of Surya on his chariot drawn by two horses (GLAIZE, 1948, Fig. 27). The figure inside the disc of the sun is dressed with crown, gorgette, bracelets and armlets typically worn by Suryavarman II. This observation provides some support to the hypothesized identification of Suryavarman II as Surya in the West Mebon and Angkor Wat bas-reliefs mentioned above. A spectacular statue of Suryavarman II as Surya sitting in front of a disc of the sun is present at Koh Ker (JACQUES & FREEMAN, 1997).

#### THAILAND'S CHOFA

The roof finial known as *chaw-fa...* is exclusively reserved for royal or religious buildings. In any of these buildings, although one may take away one motif or symbol after another... if the *chaw-fa* finial remains the building will still retain its overall character... Stripped to the bare essentials [the building] would still be visually complete by virtue of the simple up-turned curve of this roof end-piece. No one really knows its origin or meaning.

—SUMET JUMSAI, 1997: 136

*Chofa*, also *chaw-fah* (Th). “Bunch of sky” or “tassel of sky”; the slender, stylized bird’s head finial that graces the ends of the ridges of the multiple roofs of a *bot* or *viharn*, and is believed to have talismanic characteristics. Possibly signifying the Garuda, it may originally have been intended to render Buddhism more appealing to Vishnuites, the Garuda being Vishnu’s mount.

—AASEN, 1998: 246

The quotations on *chofa* (or *chaofa* or *chawfa*) given above summarize some of the conventional wisdom or consensus of opinion regarding identification and significance of the decorative finial on Thai temples. The present research indicates that the original *chofa* upon which most subsequent *chofa* have been based is the *gajasimha* of Suryavarman II.

Temple finials representing *gajasimha* presumably appeared in Cambodia during or shortly after the reign of Suryavarman II. They symbolize the unification of the northern and southern Khmer kingdoms and the reign of Suryavarman II. This symbolism spread extensively throughout the region influenced by ancient Cambodia, including parts today known as Laos, Lana Thai, and Isan. From the thirteenth to the eighteenth century large numbers of ceramic finials in the form of the *gajasimha* were produced in kilns in Ayutthaya, Sawankalok, and Sukhothai. For photographs of typical examples see SPINKS, 1959; RICHARDS, 1995; and MEKDHNASARN, 1998. The finials spread throughout Thailand and beyond, reaching places so far away as southern Sulawesi (SPINKS, 1959).

The *gajasimha* *chofa* is based upon the same dragon or *kulen* as the one that Suryavarman II as Vishnu reclines upon while floating on the Sea of Milk and dreaming the cosmic dream of creation. The *gajasimha* of the earlier *chofa* have the following characteristics or attributes: an elephant-like trunk or snout, which may be located on the forehead or on the tip of the snout, or absorbed into the mane; a single lion-like head, and mane; a beard, often transformed into branching lotus or other plant-life or some other ornamentation; fore-limbs similar to those of the lion; and a body with naga-like scales on the trunk and naga-like gastrosteges or plates on the throat and belly.

Sukhothai produced enormous quantities of *gajasimha* *chofa* in ceramics, wood, and other media. Some of the most beautiful and faithful to the original *gajasimha* are the splendid ceramic finials in black and white glaze, typically 60 cm to 1 m high. In these the elephant trunk is very clearly represented, usually with processes like the “lips” of an elephant’s trunk near the end, and is quite separate and differently shaped than the mane. The individual parts of the mane are similar to each other, but different in appearance and separate from the elephant-like trunk. The anterior elements of the mane, but not the trunk, are elongate and extend well above the head. The beard is simple and beard-like and projects straight down from beneath the chin. The lion-like forelimbs are folded. A hole for the attachment of the *chofa* is often present just behind the forelimbs. Since the *chofa* consists of only the head and forepart of the *gajasimha*, the hindlimbs are not present (SPINKS, 1959, Fig. 1; ANON., 1993, Fig. 133 on p. 155); RICHARDS, 1995, Figs. 6–7; MEKDHNASARN 1998, Figs. 193–195 on pp. 142–143).

A black and white glaze ceramic *gajasimha* finial is displayed in the Suan Paskad Palace Museum in Bangkok. Unfortunately in this otherwise fine example the elephant trunk and the mane are broken off at about one-third of their length, and the beard arising below the chin is broken off entirely. There is a scar where the beard broke off. All of the *gajasimha* mentioned in this paragraph are very similar to the *gajasimha* of Suryavarman II, as seen in Khmer bas-reliefs of Vishnu reclining on the back of the *gajasimha*, the only difference being that the parts of the mane are much longer.

With the passage of time the *gajasimha chofa* was subjected to numerous artistic or representational variations and innovations, including a tendency to regress to a single- or multiple-headed figure more like a naga. The elephant-like trunk was blended into the mane or converted into a tusk; the beard was lost or converted into an ornamental floral design; the forelimbs were omitted or converted into bird-wings; deer horns were added behind the ears. Very often the body was extended to end in a long naga body without hind-limbs, sometimes ending in a fish tail or in a goose-tail ("haeng hong" in Thai).

The most outstanding modification of the *gajasimha chofa* was its progressive change from a detailed *gajasimha* with all of the original attributes to an increasingly stylized or abstract representation based solely upon the elephant-like snout. This resulted in the spectacular *chofa* that ornament the uppermost finials and stick up high into the sky. Many temples are decorated with two or even three distinct kinds of *chofa*. These types are:

- 1) with all or nearly all of the original or "primitive" characteristics of *gajasimha* (often dominating middle and lowermost *chofa* sites on the temple);
- 2) with the *gajasimha* head including especially its mane greatly elongated in the curving shape of an elephant's upraised trunk; and
- 3) with an extremely elongate form based solely upon the elephant-like trunks of the *gajasimha* (these typically dominate the uppermost *chofa* sites).

Examination of photographs and actual examples of a large number of Thai *chofa* leads me to conclude that many are based upon the *gajasimha*. Previous authors have identified the *gajasimha* of Thai *chofa* as a naga or as the tail of a naga (HANKS & HANKS, 1988: 212; JUMSAI, 1997: 136–137; AASEN, 1998). These earlier authors, however, either were unaware of the existence of the *gajasimha* or else they confused it with a naga. No one has previously identified the *chofa* with the elephant-like trunk of the triumphantly trumpeting *gajasimha* of Suryavarman II.

The kind of Thai *gajasimha* with enlarged or elongated manes described here has been the dominant inspiration for finials of Buddhist temples in Thailand up to the present day. A pair of gilded *gajasimha* of identical design flanks the statue of the Phra Buddha Jinarat, a fourteenth century image in the Sukhothai style (VAN BEEK, 1994: 100, Fig. 100). One of Thailand's most beautiful statues of Buddha, it occupies the central nave of Wat Mahatat in Phitsanulok. When Phitsanulok was defeated by the armies of Ayuthaya in the fourteenth century, it is said that the statue wept tears of blood. The pair of *gajasimha* flanking the statue shows very well the forelimbs, beards, and elephant-like trunk discrete from the mane on the back of the head. The main contours of the elongate bodies of the *gajasimha* continue as the *bai raka* of the aureole surrounding the Buddha. The characteristics of the Phra Buddha Jinarat *gajasimha* are precisely those of the *gajasimha* of Suryavarman II. The name Phitsanulok itself, originally Bisnuloka (Vishnuloka), might also be related to Suryavarman II, whose posthumous name is Paramvishnuloka.

#### BAYON FISH SCENES

L'interprétation des scènes [dans les bas-reliefs du Bayon] est une question de patience et de chance. Actuellement, il faut bien l'avouer, la majeure partie d'entre elles reste absolument inexplicable.

—GEORGE COEDÈS, 1911

C'est dans la biographie de Jayavarman VII et dans les évènements marquant son règne que il faut chercher l'interprétation des bas-reliefs du Bayon.

—GEORGE COEDÈS, 1932

The Bayon, after Angkor Wat the most famous of Angkorean temples, commemorates King Jayavarman VII (reigned 1181–1215). The giant *Avalokiteshvara* or *Lokesvara* (or Buddha or *Jayabuddha*) heads gracing the Bayon were done in his likeness (MUS, 1936; 1961). This is evident when they are compared to the extremely naturalistic formal stone sculptures of Jayavarman VII, replicas of which were distributed throughout the kingdom. Many of the richly detailed bas-reliefs adorning the Bayon relate in one way or another to the life of Jayavarman VII, as pointed out by George Coedès. Only scenes including fishes are considered here, but the observations and remarks extend to a variety of topics. Location of the Bayon fish scene bas-reliefs discussed here is shown in Fig. 1.

**Shambara and Pradyumna (southern gallery, eastern wing, low panel)**  
Figures 14–15

Make obeisance to the feet of Indra, whose name is one with magic, and the feet of Shambara, whose glory was firmly established in illusions.

—traditional invocation of Indian magicians (SIEGEL, 2000: 7)

The gods are magicians in heaven and magicians are gods on earth.

—saying of Indian magicians (SIEGEL, 2000: 6)

The story of Pradyumna and Shambara is related in *Vishnu Purana* (V, 27) and in *Bhagavad Purana* (X, 55). It probably was told to Jayavarman VII when he was a child. Born to Lord Krishna and his wife Rukumuni, Pradyumna is sometimes regarded as a reincarnation of Lord Kama, the God of Love. When six days old he was captured by the demon King Shambara, who threw him into a river where he was swallowed by a fish. The fish was caught by a fisherman and brought to Shambara's palace. Pradyumna was found alive when the fish was cut open and was cared for by Shambara's Queen Mayadevi or Mayavati. Mayadevi is also reincarnation of Rati, Kama's wife. Mayadevi learned Pradyumna's identity from the sage Narada, lord of the Gandharvas, but kept the secret to herself. When Pradyumna attained manhood she told him the truth about his origin. Pradyumna then killed Shambara and fled to Krishna's palace with Mayadevi.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>This Shambara story and Kalidasa's erotic Sanskrit play "The recognition of Sakuntala" exhibit so many parallelisms and similar details that one of them evidently is based upon the other, but which is hard to tell. King Dusyanta, an incarnation of Shiva, contracts a gandharva or "love-match" marriage with Sakuntala, promising that she will become his queen and her male offspring the heir to his throne. Distracted by love and longing, Sakuntala neglects an ascetic guest and is consequently cursed (without her knowledge) so that she will not be remembered or recognized by Dusyanta. The curse can be broken if the ring given to her by Dusyanta is returned to him. Unfortunately Sakuntala lost the ring while bathing in a river. A fisherman recovers the ring from the stomach of a carp and it is subsequently returned to Dusyanta, whose memory is thus restored and with it the rightful place of Sakuntala as his queen and their son as his heir. Kalidasa's dates are uncertain; his "Sakuntala" was perhaps composed in the late fourth or early fifth century (JOHNSON, 2001; ix).

Near the main scene is a vignette of a decorated boat with Mayadevi and a fisherman (Indra) throwing a cast-net. This delightful scene unfortunately is badly weathered (ROVEDA, 2000: 143, Fig. 219).

Shambara probably was a magician-king who lived in India perhaps 2,500 years ago. "Maya" is a Sanskrit word meaning "illusion". Thus Mayadevi, Queen of Shambara, is also the Queen of Illusion or Magic. Shambara was a protege of Indra, God of Thunder, who may have descended to earth in the guise of a fisherman to cast his magic fishing net and catch the fish with Pradyumna in its belly. Throwing a child or baby into the river and then recovering the living infant from the stomach of a huge fish may have been a magical trick or illusion that was actually performed. The story of the baby being Krishna's child would have been part of the magician's patter or speech. The magician's assistant cut open the fish that yielded back the child, and Mayadevi (or Mayavati) was a party to the illusion. Shambara presumably performed such magic in order to awe his subjects and enhance his royal power.

The child Jayavarman VII might have asked the guru telling him this story, "why would Shambara and Mayadevi go to all the trouble to trick Pradyumna?" The guru might reply that Shambara did it in order to gain entrance to Krishna's palace with the help of Mayadevi. "How did Pradyumna kill Shambara?" Why, that was also an illusion. Thus the guru may have answered and instructed the young Jayavarman VII. In the Bayon bas-relief the fish that swallowed Pradyumna is a large carp similar in appearance to the endemic Mekong species *Labeo pierrei*.

**Marriage of a *nagi* princess (east interior gallery, north aisle,  
chamber next to north lateral entrance)**

Figures 16–17

This might be one of the scenes Coedès had in mind when he said that many of the Bayon bas-reliefs seem to be "absolutely inexplicable". The viewer's attention is drawn to the pair of mermaid-like figures in the center of the scene with fish bodies and human heads. Close inspection—difficult to see in a photograph—reveals that one of the heads is female and the other male (with a short beard). As pointed out by ROVEDA (2000: 148), this scene should be considered in the context of the adjacent bas-relief that opposes it at a 90° angle.

The opposing scene depicts a maiden standing in the midst of workmen and elephants. The scene has been variously explained as erecting a prison of rock around the maiden or pulling down and desecrating of the statue of an unidentified goddess. A more plausible explanation, that the workmen and elephants are engaged in freeing the maiden from a mountain, was advanced by BOSCH (1931). Bosch also referred to the ancient story of a prince who heard singing from inside a mountain, realized that the maiden was inside, sent workmen and elephants to liberate her, and then married her. Roveda made the connection with the aquatic scene on the adjacent wall opposite, stating that opening the mountain and freeing the maiden caused a spring to flow. It seems the prince was able to marry the maiden but only on condition that they were transformed into mermaid and merman and lived in the magical spring. This interpretation is in keeping with Bosch's suggestion that the maiden is a *nagi* princess.

The *nagi* princess in a mountain bas-relief provides a detailed depiction of the techniques

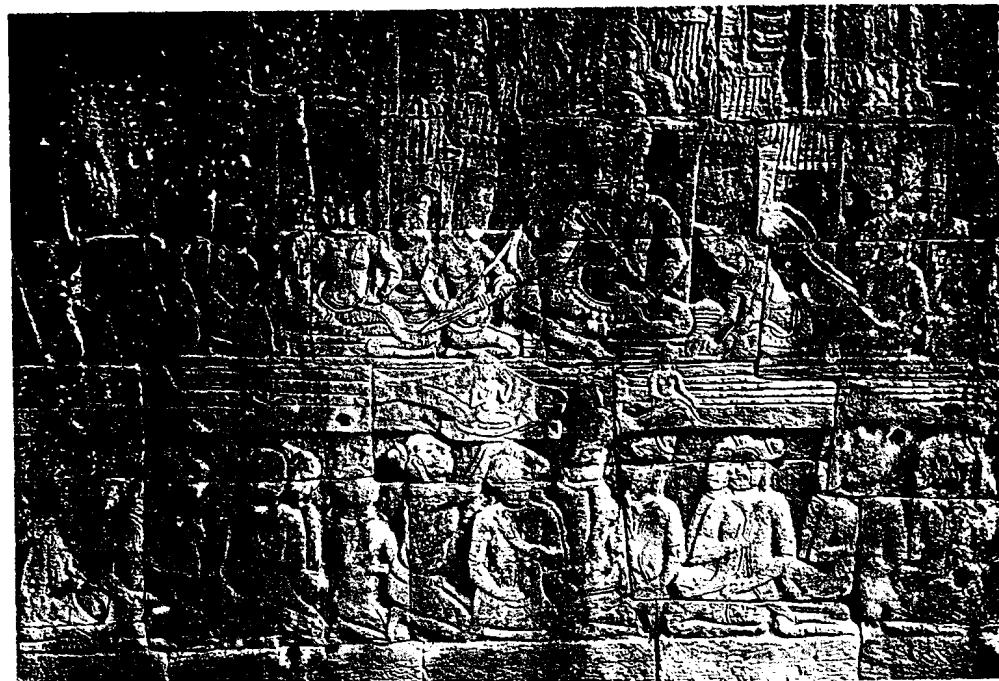


Figure 14. Shambara and Pradyumna scene. Pradyumna is seen inside a fish and later released; Shambara in upper center, with Mayadevi immediately on his left about to receive Pradyumna being lifted up to her (Bayon).



Figure 15. Shambara and Pradyumna scene detail. Pradyumna inside fish (a carp).



Figure 16. "Marriage of *nagi* princess" (Bayon). Possibly a version of the founding myth of Khmer civilization involving the marriage of the brahmin Kaundinya with a *nagi* princess.



Figure 17. "Marriage of *nagi* princess" detail. Note central figures with human heads and fish-like bodies. The head on the right appears to be a bearded brahmin (Kaundinya?).



Figure 18. Horsemen separated from maidens by a river (Bayon). There are thirteen mounted horsemen in the full scene which extends considerably to the viewer's right of this photograph.

involved in degaging rocks from mountains for temples, bridges and roads. We see men working at the mountain with pick-axes above and with fire and water or vinegar below, and elephants harnessed to haul away the rock.

The two bas-reliefs might depict the mythological marriage between the brahmin Kaundinya and the local *nagi* princess Soma which supposedly resulted in the foundation of Khmer civilization.

**Temple Mount Meru with Manu and Garuda avatars of Vishnu  
(interior galleries, southern face, eastern aisle).**

This poorly known bas-relief is noteworthy for its depiction of a large fish cut in half beneath a temple evidently representing Mt. Meru. Division of the Vishnu fish avatar Manu or Matsya into two halves is a symbolic representation of the passage of the ages or *yuga* that is presided over by Vishnu. Here Vishnu is also represented as Garuda and perhaps also in human form seated on top of Meru. There are two large eagles, natural counterparts of Garuda. Significance of serried ranks of warriors on left side of scene is unknown. Mount Meru is represented as a multi-tiered temple, a common theme in Hindu art. The actual temple could be the Phimeanakas. According to Hindust tradition Manu in two halves would figuratively or literally exist underground and out of sight. Statuary or other stonework representing Manu might be present in the foundation of the temple.



Figure 19. Sacred pond scene or royal aquarium? (Bayon).



Figure 20. Sacred pond detail or royal aquarium? detail. Huge fish about to swallow a ruminant (a young goat?). A Khmer inscription about the fish occurs immediately above it can be seen with a magnifying glass (see text).

**Horsemen separated from maidens by a river full of fish  
(northern gallery, western wing)**  
Figure 18

This scene depicts a forest river full of fish swimming upstream. There are some maidens on one side of the river, and on the other side horsemen or cavalry with the horses rearing up in unison, as if blocked by the river. Possibly this scene refers to an actual incident, the account of which may be lost. More likely it is allegorical, perhaps representing the lust of men and women who wish to be joined but are prevented by a barrier (in this case a river full of fish and other aquatic life).

The *Puranas* recite the theme of maidens occupying one world, separated from the men of another world by water. The water may be in the form of an ocean or a river. The men are hoping to cross to the women's world or for the women to cross to their world to requite their mutual longing.

**“Sacred pool” or royal aquarium (western gallery, northern wing)**  
Figures 19–20

This scene is remarkable, not only for its intrinsic interest, but for the two Khmer inscriptions associated with it. The scene depicts a group of shield-bearing men, apparently armed with sticks and shields, marching along a sacred pool or pond filled with fish. They are confronting a smaller group of similarly armed men. The significance of this part of the scene is unknown; perhaps it represents an unrecorded historical incident. The “sacred pond” has a variety of fish unlikely to occur naturally in a moat or pond. This suggests that it may have been a royal aquarium, stocked with special fish and protected at the behest of Jayavarman VII.

The viewer's eyes are drawn to a huge scaleless fish in the act of swallowing a small quadruped that looks very much like a goat kid. A Khmer inscription just above it was studied by COEDÈS (1932). He translated it as “Le poisson nommé ... dans le bassin sacré. Le cerf qui est sa nourriture” [“The fish named... in the sacred basin. The deer that is its food”].

Coedès suggested that the inscription was intended either as an explanation to viewers, or as instructions to the sculptor. Although Coedès identified the mammal as a deer or other member of the family Cervidae, it strongly resembles a young goat. The fish was tentatively identified with the *tray reach* (“royal fish”) or giant Mekong catfish now scientifically known as *Pangasianodon gigas*. It is identified as the giant carp *Catlocarpio siamensis* by VUTHY & PEANG (1999), who apparently did not consult the 1932 paper by COEDÈS. The absence of scales—almost invariably depicted in Angkor Wat and Bayon bas-reliefs of carps—indicates that it is not a carp. It also is unlikely that *Catlocarpio*, with its extremely delicate pharyngeal filter-feeding structure, would ingest a mammal of this size.

The giant fish possibly represents a member of the catfish family Pangasiidae. The species might be *Pangasius sanitwongsei*. The fondness of this species for dogs and other mammals is well known. Feeding on such a mammal is unlikely behavior for *P. gigas*. At the time Coedès wrote his paper the distinction between these two giant species of Pangasiidae was not known.

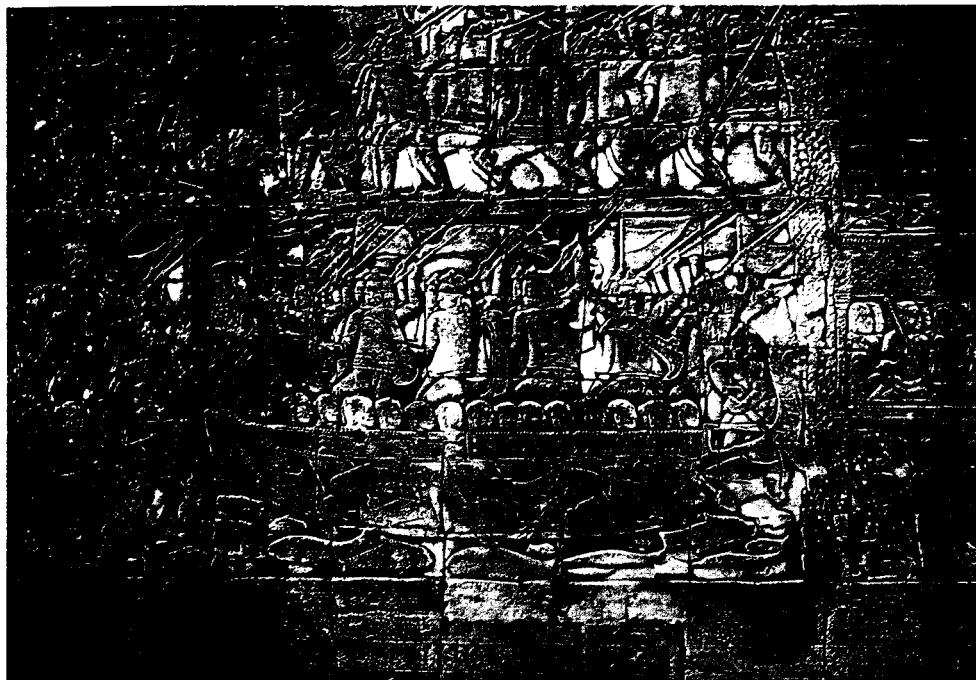


Figure 21. Khmer-Cham naval battle detail (Bayon, southern gallery). Note small *gajasimha* beneath the boat's prow (this apparently is the only *gajasimha* in a Bayon bas-relief). Bump-headed fish immediately below stern may represent *Bangana behri*.

#### Khmer-Cham naval battle (southern gallery) Figure 21

On n'a pas expliqué jusqu'ici l'implantation [of the the Buddhist temple] de Vat Nokor [at the modern site of Kampong Cham]. Cet édifice est le seul que Jayavarman [VII] ait construit dans tout l'Est ou le Sud-Est du pays. Son rôle sur une des routes principales vers la Champa, est manifest. Il marque assez bien ce que pouvait être la frontière ou du moins la zone de affrontement entre les deux puissances à cette époque, et cela davantage encore si l'on étudie les vois d'eau... Une rencontre navale dans cette région, Jayavarman VII cherchant à chasser les Chams du pays et à préparer sa conquête du Vijaya, est très possible. Vat Nokor serait venu marquer cette victoire.

—B. P. GROSPLIER (1973: 167)

This scene, the greatest single episode on the Bayon, covers most of the Bayon's southern gallery. It presumably depicts the decisive Khmer-Cham naval battle from which Jayavarman VII emerged victorious in 1179. Most authors have identified the battle site as the Great Lake. The historian B. P. Groslier, however, notes that it probably occurred on the Mekong River mainstream upriver from Phnom Penh, possibly near the modern site of Kompong Cham (GROSPLIER, 1973: 167)



Figure 22. Chinese junk river cruise scene (Bayon, southern gallery).



Figure 23. Chinese junk river cruise detail. A man fishing with a cast-net. Note the twisting technique to tighten the meshes while drawing in the net.

Figure 24. Chinese junk river cruise detail.  
Man fishing with cast-net from a  
boat. Note turtle (*Batagur baskar*?)  
caught on outside of net; it will not  
get away (see text).

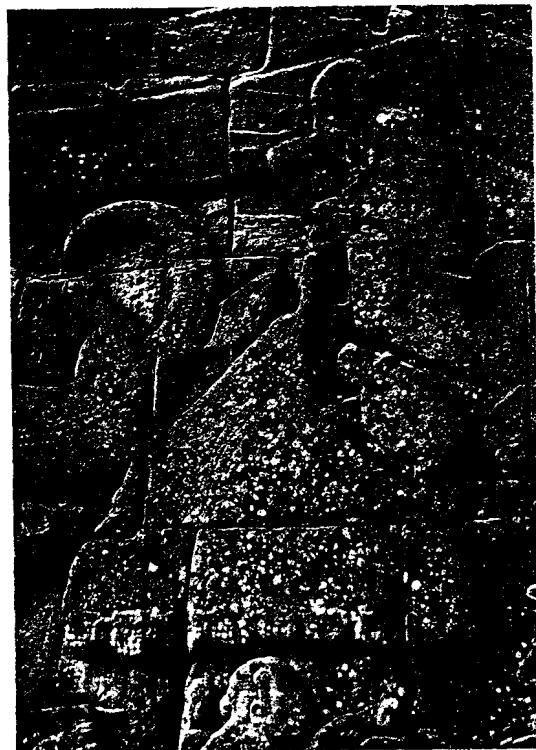


Figure 25. Chinese junk river cruise detail. Chinese gentleman.



Figure 26. Chinese junk river cruise detail. Women selling and buying fish. Note turtle (*Batagur baskar?*) below table.

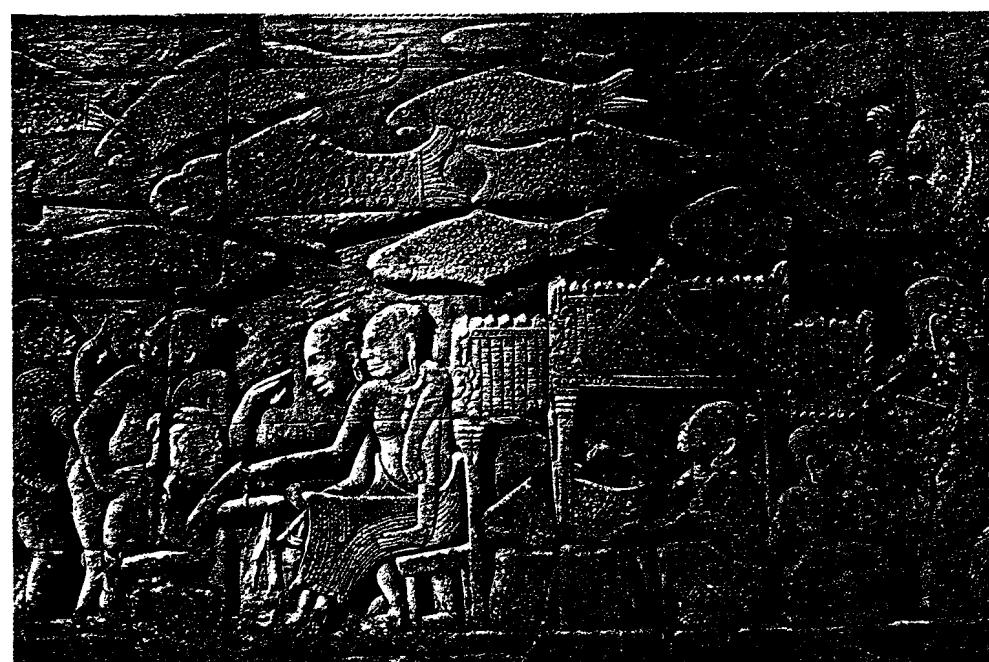


Figure 27. Woman selling a fish (a carp). The building might be one of Jayavarman VII's dharmasala. The two fish in the upper left hand corner are a featherfin, probably *Chitala* sp., and a carp, tentatively identified as *Bangana berhri*.



Figure 28. Chinese junk river cruise detail. Cooking fish. Method of placing fish between bamboo splints identical with modern practice.



Figure 29. Chinese junk river cruise detail. Chinese and Khmer wagering on a cock-fight (compare with Angor Wat cock-fight scene in Fig. 11). Note giant fish (a carp) and crocodile devouring a fish.

The presence of individuals of a large bump-headed carp, identified here as the Mekong endemic species *Bangana behri*, is relevant. This large and distinctive species is unknown from the Great Lake. It occurs in the Mekong mainstream, mainly in or near rapids and in areas with extensive rocky bottom, far upstream from Phnom Penh. The southernmost part of its usual habitat is not precisely known, but is thought to be in the vicinity of Kratie. This suggests that the battle might have taken place in the swift-flowing stretch of the Mekong mainstream extending from Stung Treng to Kratie, well upstream from Kompong Cham.

It may be speculated that Jayavarman VII permitted the Chams defeated in the naval battle to settle in the area now known as Kampong Cham, and that he had Vat Nokor constructed for them in the hope that they would be good Buddhists and peaceful citizens.

**Chinese on a river cruise  
(southern gallery, eastern wing)**

Figures 22–29

Depicting a relaxed and bare-footed man larger than life size as the central figure (Figs. 22–25), the richness and composition of the scene calls to mind the Angkor Wat bas-relief of the “Fête Nautique des Dvaravati”. The man seated in the middle of a pleasure boat and all of the other people in the boat appear to be Chinese. At the top of the scene are two boats with Khmer fishermen drawing their cast-nets. At the bottom are several smaller scenes or vignettes of people engaged in every-day activities including selling, buying and cooking fish.

The large-scale depictions of two fishermen in the act of retrieving their cast-nets are especially fine. The nets are extremely well constructed, with a “ruffled lead-line” to enhance the catch. Both fishermen are drawing in their nets slowly, twisting them as they do. The bow or torque in the cast-nets, induced by twisting them as they are brought in, is very skillfully sculpted. One of the nets shows a turtle struggling on its outer surface. Due to the twisting of the net and tightening of its meshes, the turtle has little chance of escaping.

The large bump-headed carp in one of the scenes (Fig. 27) is interesting. If its identification as the rheophilic species *Bangana behri* is correct, it indicates that the locality of the scene is the upper part of the Mekong in Cambodia where this fish species is found, i.e. the swift-flowing stretch between Kratie and Stung Treng.

**Scenes in the lives of ordinary people  
(southern gallery, eastern wing, and elsewhere)**

Figures 23–25, 27–29

The Bayon is justly famous for every day vignettes in the life of the people. We find people engaged in just about every activity except sex (no equivalent of India’s Khajuraho has been found in Cambodia): eating and drinking, selling and buying, cooking, gaming, gambling, juggling, balancing, wrestling, playing music and dancing, hunting and fishing, cock-fighting, boar-fighting, and so on. A number of scenes depict people buying and selling or cooking fish in settings that could easily pass for present-day Cambodia. Similarly ornamented substantial buildings occur in many of these scenes. Viewing bas-reliefs of

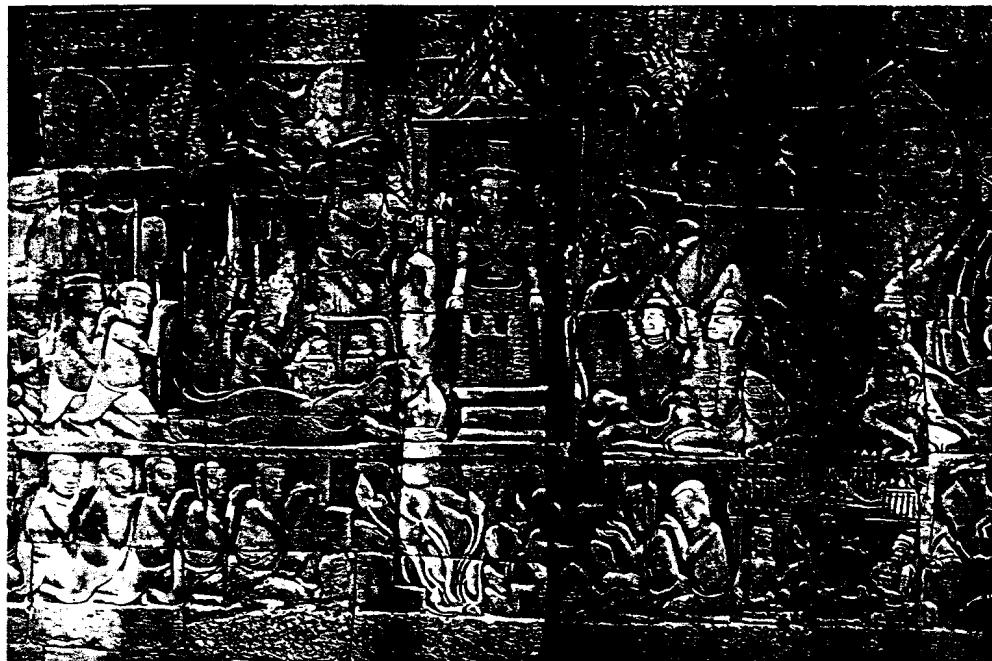


Figure 30. Vishnu temple scene. The reclining figure might be Jayavarman VII (Bayon). The Vishnu statue might be the one of Suryavarman II in the central tower of Angkor Wat.

people catching fish, selling and buying fish, and roasting fish one is reminded of the importance of fish in the lives of the Khmer. Fish apparently was then, as it is today, the Khmer's most important source of animal protein and of calcium.

**Figure reclining before statue of Vishnu  
(southern gallery, western wing, low gallery)**  
Figures 30–32

One of the most intriguing and intimate scenes in the Bayon bas-reliefs depicts a reclining figure, possibly a king or a prince, in front of a Vishnu temple. Vishnu is identified by the following attributes, all visible in Figure 30: conch-shell or *sankha* called “Pancajanga”; *cakra* or quoit-like missile weapon “Sudarsana”; *gada* or club called “Kaumaduki”; and sword called “Nandaka”. Nandaka may be the sword employed to cut fish in half in the Angkor Wat Churning. Lotus and fish, sacred to Vishnu, are present in the moat or pond in front of his temple.

This scene often is reproduced showing only the portion of the reclining figure and the Vishnu temple. The full scene includes a row of women, presumably wives or concubines, above the reclining figure. Another row of people, presumably servants or slaves, is below. In the lower right-hand foreground a building in smaller scale with several seated figures inside. Four *apsara* hover over the temple, perhaps signaling the royal status of the reclining figure.



Figure 31. Vishnu temple scene detail. The presumed Jayavarman VII and fish looking at each other. Even the lotuses are leaning towards him.



Figure 32. Vishnu temple scene detail. Close-up of a building tentatively identified as hospital. Note man (attendant?) on right with tray bearing what might be medicine flasks. The bearded man in the center (with a book in hand?) and man to his left appear to be discussing a treatment.

The reclining person may represent Jayavarman VII when he was still a prince or as a young king. The small building in the right foreground might be a hospital. This would be in keeping with the tradition of building or depicting hospitals near Vishnu temples and also with Jayavarman VII's future role as the most important builder of hospitals in Khmer history. Now if we look at the amazingly natural whole scene, we see that the reclining figure directly in front of Vishnu is not peering up at the god's statue, but down into a lotus- and fish-filled moat.

The fish, deep-bodied carps (such as the handsome species *Barbodes schwanefeldi*), are orienting themselves towards the face of their human viewer. Even the lotus buds are bending towards him (Fig. 31). The profile of the face of the reclining figure bears some resemblance to that of Jayavarman VII. I am inclined to believe that this is indeed a royal scene. If this is so, the Vishnu statue may be of particular importance. Probably the most important statue of Vishnu in Angkor at the time of the Bayon was the statue of Vishnu (based on Suryavarman II?) in the central tower of Angkor Wat and now lost.

**Temple with Buddhist Triad  
(Bayon, northern gallery, western wing)**  
Figures 33–35, 37

Thematically related to the preceding scene is a composition in which the central motif is not a statue of Vishnu but an incomplete Buddhist triad including a *Lokeshvara* and a *Prajnaparamita* (Mother of Buddha or Mother of all Buddhas). The central piece of the triad, presumably a statue of Buddha, has been effaced. The depiction of *Prajnaparamita* is somewhat similar to one at Banteay Chhmar (HAWIXBROCK, 1998, photo 9). In the time of Jayavarman VII *Prajnaparamita* was personified by his mother Jayarajacudamani or Cudamani and perhaps also by his first wife Jayarajadevi. There is again a lotus- and fish-filled pond or moat in the right-hand foreground. Lotus and fish are also sacred to Buddha. Perhaps significantly, the moat has seven steps: "when the Lord Buddha was born, he walked seven steps, each step on a lotus." Among the standing figures bringing offerings to the *Prajnaparamita* is a man with a pole slung over his shoulders with a flask somewhat similar to the *amrita* flasks in the Bayon Churning.

It is unknown whether the temple in the scene is an actual temple or an idealized version of a temple. Four important Buddhist temples are associated with the reign of Jayavarman II. These are the Bayon itself, commemorating Jayavarman VII; Banteay Kdei; Preah Khan, commemorating Jayavarman VII's father Dharanindravarman II as *Lokeshvara*; and Ta Prohm, commemorating Jayavarman VII's mother as *Prajnaparamita*. Installation of three statues of the Buddhist triad would have been appropriate for all of these temples.

The Bayon bas-relief under consideration might commemorate installation of the *Prajnaparamita* statue at Ta Prohm, the mortuary temple built by Jayavarman VII for his mother. If this supposition is correct then the two figures on the immediate left of the *Prajnaparamita* might be statues of Jayamangalarthadeva and Jayavarman VII's younger brother Jaya Kittadeva. The top of the scene includes three rattan trees (*Palmeae, Calamus*) with nuts hanging down on tendrils. On the far left appears perhaps the inner sanctum or shrine of a temple. A statue of Buddha, perhaps Buddha Mucilinda, probably occupied the bell-shaped area of the temple in the center of the scene. An eight-armed *Lokeshvara* or *Avalokiteshvara* occupies the temple on the left side of the scene. A pair of peacocks, *Pavo*

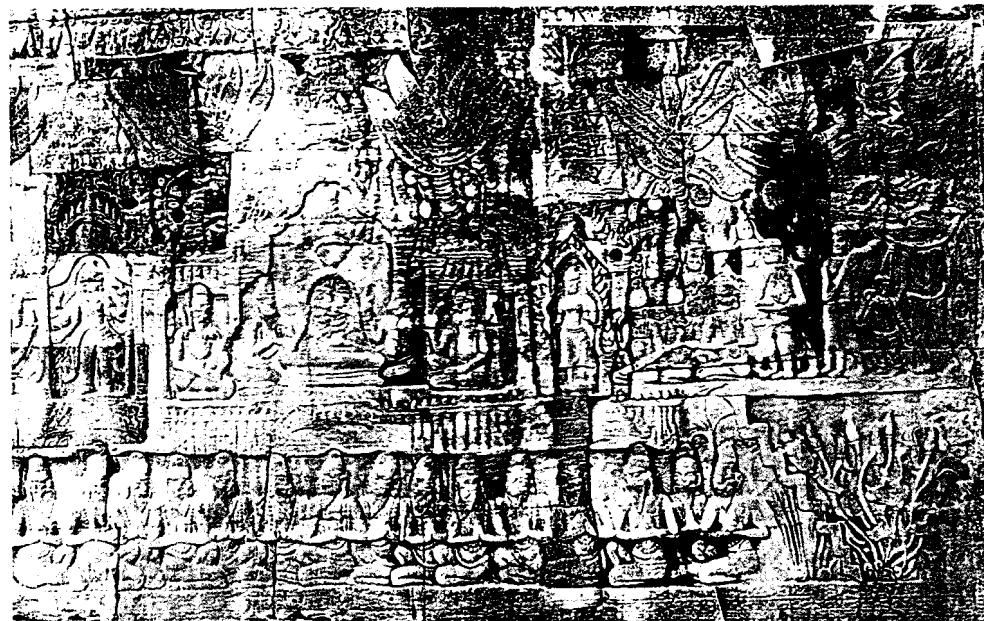


Figure 33. Buddhist temple with desecrated Buddhist triad (Bayon). Note pair of peacocks in upper right corner.

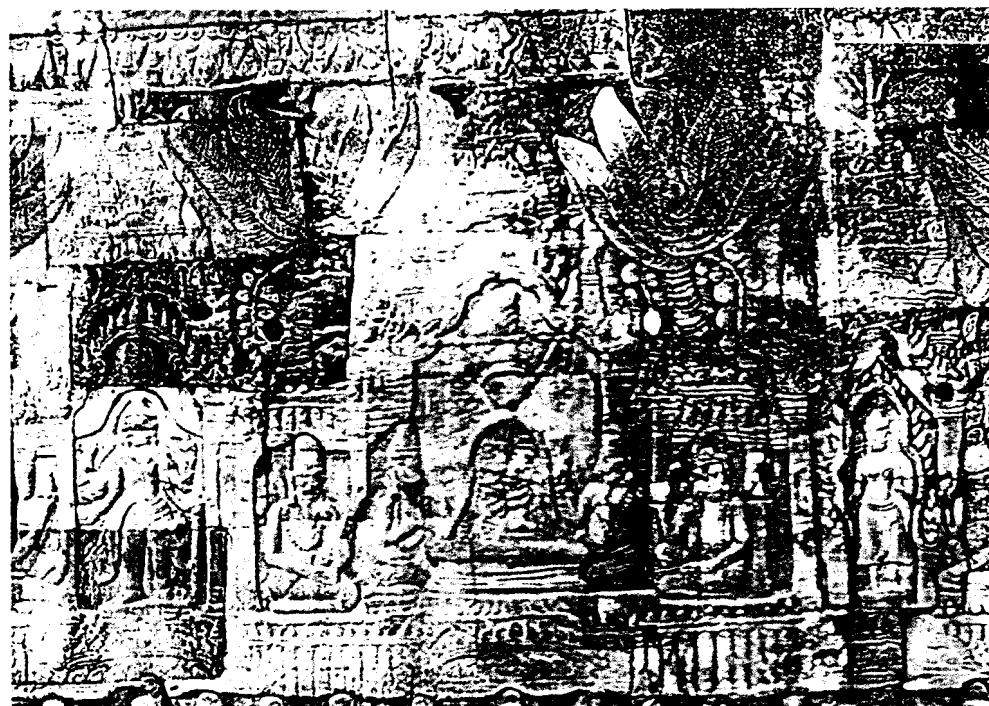


Figure 34. Buddhist temple detail. Desecrated Buddhist triad. Bell-shaped area in center foreground might have been occupied originally by an image of Jayavarman VII as Buddha Mucilinda.



Figure 35. Buddhist triad scene detail. *Prajnaparamita* statue.



Figure 36. *Prajnaparamita* statue in the Musée Guimet (MG 18046) similar to *Prajnaparamita* statue portrayed in Bayon bas-relief of Buddhist triad.

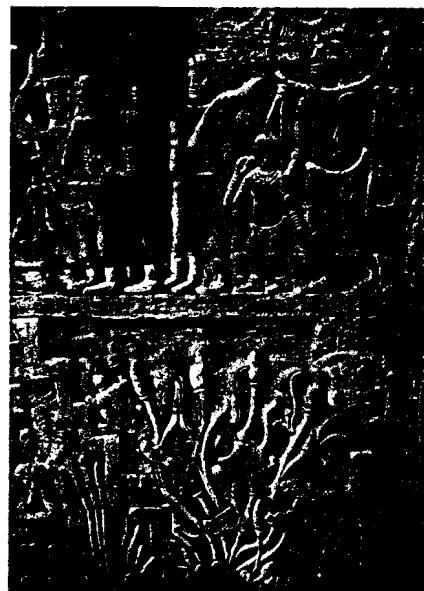


Figure 37. Buddhist triad scene detail. Close-up of moat or pond with fish, turtles, and lotus. Note seven steps in lotus pond.

*muticus*, occur in the rattan tree in the upper right-hand corner. Peacocks have been associated with queens and female divinities since ancient times.

A stele inscription in Sanskrit found in one of the galleries of Ta Prohm celebrates the erection of a statue of Jayarajacudamani, mother of Jayavarman VII, in the image of the Mother of Jina [Buddha] in 1186 (COEDÈS, 1906). This date may also be the date of the consecration of Ta Prohm (BRIGGS, 1951: 222).

The *Prajnaparamita* statue installed in the Rajavihara apparently “disappeared” at the time of the Shivaite reaction. It may have been destroyed by the reactionaries or removed and hidden before that could happen. A statue found at Banteay Kdei, displayed in the Musée Guimet as “Divinité Feminine” (MG 18046) might be the Ta Prohm *Prajnaparamita* or a copy of it (Fig. 36). Unfortunately the head and arms are missing but the resemblance of this statue to the bas-relief of the *Prajnaparamita* under discussion is striking. A difference in the folding of the dress or loincloth should be noted. The manner in which loincloths might have been folded to achieve such effects is discussed by MARCHAL, 1927.

It is surprising that this Buddhist triad scene survived the anti-Buddhist Shivaite reaction during the reign of Jayavarman VIII as well as it did. The only damages obviously inflicted by humans are the effacement of the central Buddha figure and marring of the faces of the *Lokeshvara*, *Prajnaparamita*, and of the principle brahmin-like figures.

To the viewer’s left of the three towers is a brahmin (Jayamangalarathadeva?) seated on a dais with a pair of *apsara* hovering above him. Numerous figures are kneeling in obeisance or reverence to him, including one enlarged figure (Jayavarman VII?) raising both arms to touch the brahmin’s extended arm.

Still further to the viewer’s left is the multi-armed *Lokeshvara* or *Avalokitesvara* figure perhaps identifiable as “*Boddhisattva Lokeshvara Irradiant*.” Numerous variants of such statues were made and distributed throughout the Khmer Kingdom. In many of them the face strongly resembles that of Jayavarman VII. The statue erected in the temple presumably had such a face.

At first glance it seems likely that there is enough detail in the scene to permit identification of the temple. If the Bayon bas-relief just described is based on an actual temple, as seems most likely, the temple probably is Ta Prohm. It should be remembered that exact correspondence with reality is not to be expected, especially in the matter of the relative placement of the towers. To depict all three statues of the Buddhist triad in one scene, and otherwise convey the maximum amount of information within a limited space, considerable liberties might have been taken. Designers of the bas-reliefs frequently employed devices that distort reality, such as unnatural juxtaposition or proximity, simultaneous depiction of interior and exterior views, differential enlargement or reduction of parts of scenes, and time lapses.

If the interpretations advanced here is correct, this scene memorializes one or more of the following:

- 1) completion of the Buddhist temple Ta Prohm, originally called Rajavihara (see BRIGGS, 1951: 221);
- 2) recognition of Jayavarman VII’s mother as *Prajnaparamita* or Mother of (all) Buddha(s);
- 3) installation of a statue of the *Prajnaparamita* at Ta Prohm;
- 4) birth of Jayavarman VII, the Jayabuddha or living Buddha Raja; and
- 5) inception of Mahayana Buddhism as the pre-eminent religion of the Khmer kingdom.

**Shivaite temple based on previous Buddhist temple  
(southeast corner pavilion)**  
Figures 38–39

Confirmation of the significance of the Buddhist temple scene comes from a little-known bas-relief in the southeast corner pavilion of the Bayon (DUFOUR & CARPEAUX, 1910, pls. 13–14; JACQUES & FREEMAN, 1997: 33). This intriguing bas-relief apparently records what happened to the temple during the anti-Buddhist Shivaite reaction of Jayavarman VIII (reigned 1243–1296)<sup>7</sup>.

The towers housing statues of the *Lokeshvara* and *Prajnaparamita* in the Buddhist version are shown here walled up with stone. In the central tower the presumed Buddha statue and the figures tentatively identified as Jayamangalartha and Jaya Kittadeva have been replaced by a *Shiva-linga*. The row of kneeling brahmin adorants below the Buddhist temple has been replaced by non-brahmin adorants with attendants bearing palm fronds. The seven-stepped pond with lotus and fish has been left out.

Whereas work on the Buddhist temple bas-relief was completed, work on this Shivaite temple bas-relief is curiously incomplete. Part of it with adorants kneeling on a platform, climbing up stairs to the platform, and standing just below it, is complete. Also complete or nearly complete are two *apsara* dancing in the lower right corner. Work on the rest of the bas-relief including the temples is incomplete. Most of the details have been sketched or scratched onto the surface and await the finishing scultural touches. In the center of the bas-relief is an area of undecorated stone surface.

The position of the towers is almost precisely the same as in the original Bayon bas-relief depicting the Buddhist triad. The crowning trident or *trisula*, equally appropriate for temples dedicated to Shiva or to Buddha, and other details of the towers are identical. Rattan trees occupy the same places as in the original bas-relief. The tower portion of this Shivaite bas-relief, although slightly smaller in scale, seems to have been copied from the Buddhist temple bas-relief.

Evidence that the present bas-relief is indeed partly a copy of the Bayon “temple with Buddhist triad” bas-relief is provided by their respective treatment of birds. In the upper right hand corner of the bas-relief of the Buddhist temple is a pair of well-executed peacocks. These are the only birds in the scene. In the Shivaite bas-relief there are five single birds widely spaced apart. They are nearly identical in form and posture, nondescript, and not identifiable as peacocks. They are evenly spaced across the top of the bas-relief. One of them occupies the extreme upper right-hand position comparable to the location of the peacocks in the Buddhist composition. The others are placed at the tops of the towers that formerly housed the *Prajnaparamita* and other Buddhist effigies.

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<sup>7</sup>It has been suggested that the Shivaite reaction began or took place immediately before the reign of Jayavarman VIII (see COEDÈS, 1968: 174)

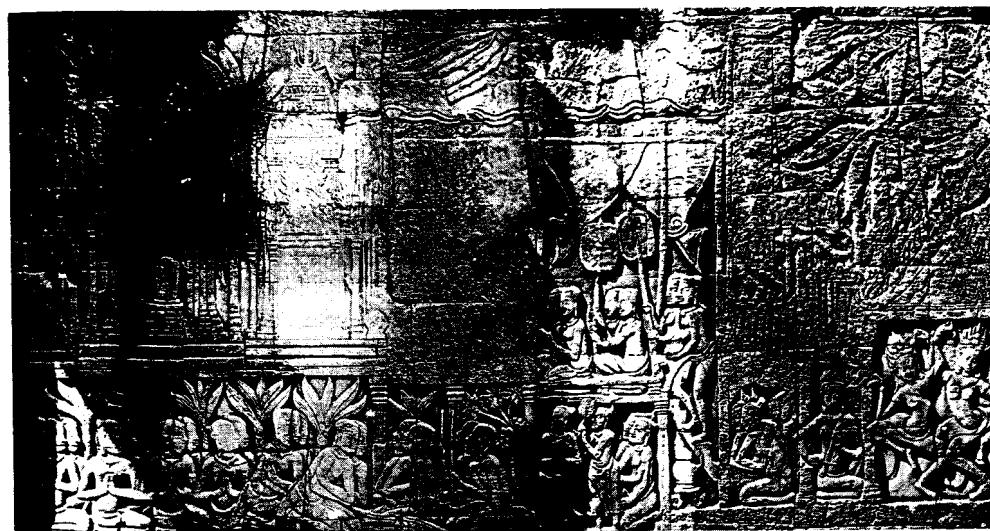


Figure 38. Shivaite temple scene (Bayon). Compare with Buddhist temple scene in Figs. 33–34.



Figure 39. Shivaite temple scene detail. Note installation of linga and other acts of desecration of the towers housing the Buddhist triad (Bayon). Compare with Fig. 34.

## SURYAVARMAN II AND THE BAYON

So far as the author is aware, Suryavarman II has not been associated previously with the Bayon except in a few inscriptions noted by GROSIER (1973). Most of these inscriptions refer only indirectly to Suryavarman II, their main subject being a general or someone else who had served during his reign. One inscription refers to "Suryarajadevi," possibly the queen of Suryavarman II (*op cit.*: 198). Perhaps the most important reference to Suryavarman II in the Bayon inscriptions is on in the small northeastern chapel, inscription K 293-11 in which Suryavarman II and his consort are mentioned (*op cit.*: 203).

Suryavarman II-*gajasimha* symbolism is present in the Bayon. Numerous EFEO archival photos record the presence of Garuda-type balustrades on the premises of the Bayon. A bas-relief on a lintel from the western portal of the Bayon depicts Vishnu reclining on a *gajasimha* (Fig. 3). As noted above, a single *gajasimha* is present in the "Khmer-Cham naval battle" scene bas-relief (Fig. 21).

Bayon bas-reliefs should be searched for depictions of Suryavarman II. The bas-reliefs of the interior gallery of the Bayon portray mythological scenes and historical scenes of earlier Khmer kings. These bas-reliefs might include representations of Suryavarman II. One candidate for such a scene is that of a king wrestling with a huge snake (EFEO Khmer photoarchives 6306, galerie Est, moitié Nord, panneau 2-face). Immediately to the viewer's right of this figure is a figure seated on a throne with a sword held upwards in the right hand and a dagger in at the waist. Both figures are dressed like other figures that have been identified or tentatively identified as Suryavarman II. Such a large snake, if based on the actual herpetofauna of Cambodia, could only be a giant species of *Python*, either *P. reticulatus* or *P. molurus*. Large individuals of these non-poisonous snakes are capable of killing large prey, including cattle and humans, by constriction.

The scene has been interpreted as a representation of the Leper King, who struggled with the forces of evil in the form of the snake and contracted leprosy after the snake sprayed its venom on him. Another hypothesis is that the king in the scene is Suryavarman II, whose real life battles were symbolized as encounters with snakes. Here we may see him fighting the Khmer traditional enemy, the Chams. Suryavarman II fought various battles against the Chams during his reign but did not succeed in achieving a definitive victory over them. The mythological hypothesis of the Leper King and the historical hypothesis of Suryavarman II might apply equally well to this bas-relief.

This brief discussion of Suryavarman II in the Bayon may be concluded by referring once again to the Bayon scene in which Jayavarman VII is identified tentatively reclining before a statue of Vishnu. The statue of Vishnu in question could represent Suryavarman II. It may be noted that while the lower garment or robe is distinctive, the style of the headdress is similar to that of the several depictions of Vishnu identified here with Suryavarman II. The most important statue of Vishnu in the guise of Suryavarman II was the one installed in the central tower of Angkor Wat. The actual statue has never been found. Perhaps it looked like the Bayon bas-relief of the Vishnu statue under consideration.

## DISCUSSION

As indicated in the Introduction, this discussion is devoted to the more important, critical and interesting comments made by reviewers and other commentators on various drafts of the manuscript of this paper.

**Angkor Wat Churning of the Sea of Milk.**—Reviewers mentioned that there are other textual versions of the Churning of the Sea of Milk than the one summarized by me. One mentioned that in most Churning depictions in Indian temples the poison generated during the Churning is swallowed by Shiva rather than Krishna, since most Hindu temples in India are Shivaite. Since Angkor Wat is a Vishnuite temple, however, it is reasonable to cite a version of the Churning myth in which the poison is swallowed by Vishnu's reincarnation or by his son Krishna. Another comment is that all of Krishna, and not just his neck, turned blue. This, of course, depends upon the textual version. The most interesting comment is that the Angkor Wat Churning scene is based on a particular version of the myth that was current in South India as recently as the seventeenth century. This account differs in several details from the account cited by me, notably in that the poison arises not from the naga Vasuki but from Mt Mandara.

Mt Mandara as the origin of the poison in the Sea of Milk might refer to ancient Indian experiences of toxic volcanic emissions. It is unclear on what basis the categorical claim is made that the Angkor Wat Churning bas-relief is based exclusively on a particular textual account. When the bas-reliefs were created there already were numerous versions available of the Churning, likely including one or more in Cambodia that have not come down to us. I do not know of any sound reason to suppose that the Angkor Wat bas-relief was based on a single textual version.

Two reviewers expressed doubt that fish in the Angkor Wat Churning have been cut in half by Vishnu's sword and another reviewer contradicted it in very strong and unflattering terms. This shows how difficult it is for some people to give up preconceived notions. Anyone considering the scene for the first time and taking a good look at it (Fig. 7) can easily see for themselves that the sculptor(s) skillfully depict the fish and other animals being cut in half by Vishnu's sword. In this, as in many instances including the presence of *gajasimha*, the Angkor Wat Churning bas-relief differs significantly from other Churning bas-reliefs and from known textual accounts. The most important of these deviations seem to be related to Suryavarman II in the role of Vishnu.

It must be emphasized that the aquatic habitat represented in the Angkor Wat Churning scene is definitely not a sea or marine environment, but rather fresh water. Also, while the fish life in the scene is similar or identical to that of the Great Lake, the scene itself is clearly a river. The river flows from the viewer's right, past the central Vishnu figure, to the left. The fishes in the river are generally swimming in an upstream direction but are being carried downstream past Vishnu. The featherback fishes, carps, and catfish that dominate the scene belong to primary freshwater fish groups that can only live in fresh water and that die if they are exposed to water with salt concentration well below that of sea water. The fish upstream from the reach of Vishnu's sword are all intact. As they come within reach of his sword-arm, they are neatly cut in half but the pieces remain close together. As the cut fish are carried farther and farther downstream the halves become more and more separated.

Regarding Suryavarman II's *gajasimha*, one reviewer commented "the problem is that

those dragon-like naga of Angkor Wat correspond to a period when strong links were established between Suryavarman II and China [and Chinese dragons].” Other commentators pointed out the supposed similarity of ancient Angkorean “dragons” and Chinese dragons. Such confusion is due to a lack of familiarity with the *gajasimha*. As pointed out here, the *gajasimha* is primarily a “hybrid” of lion, elephant and naga. The original source of this mythological creature is India or the Indian subcontinent. The elephant-like characteristics displayed by the *gajasimha* range from the full head including elephant-like trunk, and tusks, to just the elephant-like trunk. Chinese dragons (invariably?) lack elephant features. This of course excludes relatively late “Chinese” dragons influenced by the Indian and Khmer *gajasimha* found in southern Yunnan and possibly elsewhere.

Other significant distinctions between Indo-Khmer *gajasimha* and Chinese dragons involve the shape of the mouth and the relationship to *makara-kurtimukha*. The Khmer *gajasimha* typically has an angulated mouth corresponding to the shape of the Hinduist *makara* mouth readily seen in the *makara*-mouth portals of numerous Indian and Khmer temples. The best known Angkorean Khmer examples are those of Banteay Srei. The shape of the mouths of Chinese dragons is highly variable but so far as the author is aware it is never similar to that of Khmer *gajasimha*. Khmer *gajasimha* are frequently portrayed emerging from *kurtimukha*. Sometimes *gajasimha* play the role of *makara-kurtimukha*, with elephants, lions, or mythological beasts being swallowed or emerging from their gaping mouths. The *makara-kurtimukha* device does not exist in classical Chinese iconography.

Reviewers and commentators expressed doubt about the correctness of identifying Suryavarman II in numerous scenes of Angkor Wat and Jayavarman VII in several scenes of the Bayon, and perhaps they are right. None of them provide specific alternative identifications of the figures involved other than the standard mythological identifications. One suggests in not very complementary fashion that my inadequate knowledge of Khmer and Hindu mythology has led to gross misidentifications of well known mythological figures, another more gently that I should leave more place for Suryavarman II’s capable generals and other personages associated with him. My response is that identification of Suryavarman II with a host of historical and mythological characters is in keeping with the basic Hindu concepts of monism or “the oneness of all creation” (Sanskrit *advaita*). It also is in keeping with the ability of any god to assume the form and identity of any other god or being. There is, in addition, a specific reason to expect representations of Suryavarman II in various guises, including those of Vishnu, Varuna and Indra (MANI, 1975; STORM, 2000).

In the *Brahma Puranas* (fourth century), twelve “splendours” are attributed to the sun god Surya, and he is given the names of twelve corresponding deities including Indra, Vishnu, Varuna, and Mitra. Surya himself is said to be the supreme spirit, who, by means of these splendours, permeates the universe and radiates as far as the secret soul of men (STORM, 2000: 77). According to *Agni Purana* (Chapter 51), Surya is one of the twelve sons of Kasyapa and Aditi. Collectively the sons are known as the *Aditya* (sons of Aditi). The twelve are Surya, Varuna, Sahasramsu, Dhata, Tapana, Savita, Gahsati, Rasvi, Parjanya, Tvasta, Mitra, and Vishnu (MANI, 1975: 770). In other accounts some of the names are different. Often the twelve names are used as synonyms of Surya. Alternatively, Surya is considered to represent all twelve sons simultaneously.

The lineage including Suryavarman II and Jayavarman VII supposedly began with

Suryavarman II's great grandfather Hiranyavarman, founder of the dynasty that took control of the Angkorean Khmer Empire in 1080. According to the Phnom Rung inscription translated by COEDÈS (1954), Hiranyavarman descended from the sun-god Aditya [=Surya], and Laksmi, consort of Vishnu. Because of this divine origin, the suffixes *-aditya* and *-laksmi* were used for male and female members of the family (although not exclusively so). Suryavarman II's father was Ksitindraditiya and his mother Narendralaksmi (MANNIKKA, 2000: 22, 304). Suryavarman II's birth name apparently is unrecorded but it may well have ended in *-aditya*.

The Bayon.—Several reviewers call into question my identification of Jayavarman VII in various Bayon bas-reliefs, particularly the scene of the reclining figure before the statue of Vishnu gazing into the fish pond. I discussed this scene with the late Khmerologist Albert le Bonheur in 1995. He agreed that the reclining personage was probably royalty, either a king or a prince, but doubted my suggestion that it was Jayavarman VII. One anonymous reviewer has strongly rejected the identification, saying that “the historical and religious contexts are just not Jayavarman VII’s” and “the resemblance of the profile has very little weight.” Granted that Jayavarman VII cannot be positively identified from the profile of the face of the reclining figure, the profile at leasts excludes an identification with Suryavarman II, the most obvious Vishnuite royal candidate. As to the supposed historical and religious contexts, this is more a matter of opinion or conventional wisdom. Another reviewer referring to the same scene states that Jayavarman VII was “a Mahayanist Buddhist unlikely to give support to Vishnuism systematically [i.e. by building or depicting hospitals near Vishnu temples]”. This argument carries little weight. The interpretation that Jayavarman VII honored all religions, a tradition characteristic not only of Jayavarman VII but of several of his royal predecessors—including Yasovarman I and Suryavarman I—is not original with me (see numerous references in BRIGGS, 1951).

The opinion of Khmerologist Vittorio Rovero may also be mentioned, together with his hypothesis concerning the religious significance of the Bayon. Rovero acknowledges that Jayavarman VII “was a fervent Buddhist who did everything he could to affirm his faith.” He also “exercised a great tolerance for Hindu beliefs as evidenced by the sanctuaries of Preah Khan and the Bayon.” “The Bayon is actually a pantheon consisting of a Buddhist core, surrounded by shrines to the memory of the old Khmer kings to the South, Shivaite divinities to the North, and Vishnuite divinities to the West” (ROVEDA, 2000: 11).

A more general response to these criticisms is that they fail to provide any better hypothesis (or any hypothesis at all) for the identification of the commanding figures in various Bayon bas-reliefs scenes. It is better to have a hypothesis that can be tested and rejected than no hypothesis at all. The alternative is to accept that the bas-reliefs or iconographs of the Bayon have very little or nothing to tell us about Jayavarman VII or of how he was viewed or portrayed by his contemporaries and immediate successors.

According to one commentator the only evidence of the occurrence of a Khmer-Cham naval battle is that provided by the Bayon bas-reliefs. In other words, no epigraphic or written account exists of such an event. Unless and until such written evidence is found, he says, evidence for the occurrence of the battle, and of Jayavarman VII's possible participation in it, is provided only by the bas-reliefs of the Bayon. This Bayon scene, however, and one similar to it on the temple of Banteay Chmar (South exterior gallery, East part) has been identified with the naval battle referred to in an inscription on the Phimeanakas Stele (stele LXX) by COEDÈS, 1930: 326; 1932: 77–78). According to the

inscription a Khmer-Cham naval battle occurred in 1177. COEDÈS (1932: 78) tentatively identified a large figure in the upper right hand corner of the scene as Jayavarman VII engaged in a ceremony of “possessing the palace” after his inauguration. This, however, is not supported by epigraphic evidence.

One anonymous reviewer wrote: “Must it be repeated that, in the case of the Bayon, a monument which underwent important and complex modifications, the interior gallery sculpture and that of the exterior gallery are not contemporaneous. The bas-reliefs of the interior gallery were realized after Jayavarman VII’s death and the Bayon was transformed into a Hindu temple (as Dumarçay reminded us recently in *Archipel* 61, 2001, p. 187). The interior and exterior galleries thus correspond to two different contexts. In this manner, one cannot treat the scenes without systematically mentioning this distinction and without taking it into account, which the author does not do.”

The point is well taken but the reviewer errs in supposing that I did not take the distinction into consideration. The distinction mentioned is not so clear as implied by the reviewer. While some, many, or all of the bas-reliefs of the interior gallery of the Bayon may have been done after Jayavarman VII’s death, it does not necessarily follow that they were done after the Bayon “was transformed into a Hindu temple.” The date of execution of the various bas-reliefs is not definitely established, even in relative terms, with very few exceptions. Among the exceptions are the two scenes tentatively identified here with the Rajavihara or Ta Prohm. The earlier of the two bas-reliefs supposedly was executed some time after construction of the temple and its consecration to Mahayana Buddhism in 1191 but before the Shivaite anti-Buddhist reaction some 50 years later. The second presumably was done within the eight-year period of the reaction during the reign of Jayavarman VIII.

The relevant remarks of DURMARÇAY, 2001: 187–188 may be reproduced here in full (translated by the author from the original French):

In the Bayon (the reliefs of the interior gallery are not from the end of the twelfth century but after the death of Jayavarman VII and upon the transformation of the Bayon into a Hindu temple, about 1220), the internal gallery has been profoundly restructured (“remaniée”) during the entire existence of the monument and, due to this, is found in a great architectural incoherence. There are numerous changes of plans making circulation in the gallery difficult and sometimes the passages are completely inaccessible, which was already the case when sculpting the reliefs was undertaken. N. Rodriguez raises questions about the sense of the reading of the reliefs, but, as G. Coedès previously noted, since numerous panels are not accessible to the faithful (see note 11 of N. Rodriguez), the reading of the story was no doubt not envisaged. Thus in the royal palace of Bangkok or in that of Phnom Penh, the great frescoes that ornament the galleries of the pagodas near the palaces certainly illustrate the Ramayana but with much incoherence in the succession of images. The account is there probably in order to illustrate an ideal life of the sovereign, comparable to that of Rama, like that the kings inhabiting the palaces wished to live. The paintings are there to somehow shape destiny (“en quelque sorte forcer le destin”), which must be the case for the bas-reliefs of the exterior gallery of the Bayon, those sculpted at the end of the twelfth century, during the reign of Jayavarman VII, and after his death the sculpture of the reliefs of the exterior gallery was abandoned. This is besides nearly the same as N. Rodriguez concluded his article: “In Java the account is a metaphor of the life of the king Airlanga.”

Taking the above statement into consideration, the author finds no need to modify any of the statements or hypotheses advanced here concerning his tentative identification of Jayavarman VII in various Bayon bas-reliefs. The main conclusion to be derived from Dumarçay’s remarks is that the bas-reliefs of the Bayon represent, if perhaps only

metaphorically, real or imagined events in the life of Jayavaram VII. It is difficult to determine from the bas-reliefs when or where the events took place, and also whether particular bas-reliefs were done during or after the life of Jayavarman VII.

According to another anonymous reviewer, “the Bayon bas-reliefs remain a fraught subject... with so much unresolved [concerning dating of various Bayon bas-reliefs]... it is [not] particularly profitable to discuss scenes either in the outer or inner gallery in piecemeal fashion.” This comes fairly close to a complete rejection of the Bayon part of the present study. It calls into question not only the thematic approach, but also the value of discussing individual Bayon bas-reliefs. In responding to this criticism I note two previous splendid earlier studies of individual Bayon bas-reliefs: interpretation of the “Maiden trapped in a mountain” bas-relief by BOSCH (1931) and identification of the “Shambara” bas-relief by COEDÈS (1932). To the reviewer I say also, why arbitrarily limit the scope or methods of investigation? Isn’t it possible that study of individual or thematically related bas-reliefs could help explain other bas-reliefs and provide vital clues to their date of execution?

Two reviewers state categorically that the Vishnu of West Mebon dates from the time of the Baphuon and the reign of King Udayadityavarman II. That would be in the middle of the eleventh century, and a half-century too early for Suryavarman II. While I certainly agree that the relatively small part of the perimetral wall still standing on the West Mebon has bas-reliefs that are typically Baphuon style, it seems highly likely a later king or kings including Suryavarman II sent architects and builders to the same site. They may have added new structures, new inscriptions, and new statues here as they did at many other temples, and especially during the reign of Suryavarman II (1113–ca 1150).

Most of the temple structures on West Mebon are now represented only by piles of large stones, with nothing to indicate the date of their construction. Vishnuite artifacts (the Mebon bronze and a lintel with bas-reliefs) found at the site seem iconographically and artistically more closely related to Angkor Wat (and Suryavarman II) than to the Baphuon (and Udayadityavarman II).

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the more significant hypotheses and suggested identifications or re-identifications presented in this paper may be summarized as follows:

### **Angkor Wat “Churning of the Sea of Milk”:**

1. The fish are realistically portrayed as if they have been poisoned;
2. The action of Vishnu in cutting the fish and other aquatic animals in two, the presence of numerous *gajasimha*, and probably also the presence of numerous *gajamatsya* are related to Suryavarman II;
3. The faces of all of the *deva* and *asura* and of the three giants aiding them are likenesses of Suryavarman II’s face;

### **Suryavarman II and the *gajasimha*:**

4. Suryavarman II’s relationship to Vishnu is indicated, among other things, by the *gajasimha*;
5. During the reign of Suryavarman II the *gajasimha* replaces the naga Ananta or Sesha in scenes of Vishnu Anantasayin, a major innovation in Khmer iconography;

6. The West Mebon bronze Vishnu is tentatively identified with Suryavarman II, and it is likely that he was depicted reclining on a *gajasimha*;
7. The face of the West Mebon Vishnu is a realistic likeness of the face of Suryavarman II;
8. *Gajasimha* is involved in other innovations of Khmer iconography associated with Suryavarman II, including the “Garuda balustrades”;
9. Bas-reliefs of Suryavarman II as Vishnu Anantasayin mounted on a *gajasimha* where spread throughout the Khmer kingdom;
10. *Gajasimha* and its snout like an elephant’s trunk became the main inspiration for the apical finials of Cambodian, Laotian, and Thai Buddhist temples, a tradition that continues today;
11. Recognition of Suryavarman II’s face as that of the *deva* and *asura* in the Angkor Wat Churning of the Sea of Milk and particularly recognition of his face in the very realistic West Mebon bronze statue of Vishnu facilitates identification of numerous statues of Suryavarman II previously unrecognized as such; (ROBERTS, in press);
12. Statues of Suryavarman II were produced and widely distributed. Statues depicting Suryavarman II in the guise of Vishnu, Shiva, Brahma, and Harihara, have been recovered from the Bakong, Bakheng, Neak Ta of Phnom Kulen, Phnom Bok, Prasat Thom, Wat Baset, Prah Ko, and other temples;

**Bayon fish scenes and Jayavarman VII:**

13. The supposed Khmer-Cham naval battle, documented mainly by the bas-reliefs on the Bayon, might have taken place on the swift stretch of the Mekong River upstream from Kratie;
14. Jayavarman VII may be represented in several fish scenes, including the one with a young man or prince reclining before a statue of Vishnu and a pond with lotus and fish;
15. Bayon bas-relief fish scenes include one that might represent Ta Prohm or the Buddhist “Rajavihara” at the time of or just after the installation of the Buddhist triad including the *Lokesvara*, the *Prajnaparamita* or Mother of Buddha, and presumably a central Buddha figure, probably seated on a naga’s coils and protected by the naga’s hood (Buddha Mucilinda);
16. The desecration of the temple and its Buddhist triad that presumably occurred during the Shivaite anti-Buddhist reaction in the reign of Jayavarman VIII is recorded in another Bayon bas-relief;
17. A statue in the Musée Guimet (MG 18046) is similar or identical to the statue of the *Prajnaparamita* that was installed in the Rajavihara;
18. The multi-armed *Lokesvara* of the Rajavihara or Ta Prohm Buddhist triad and the Bayon Buddha seated on a coiled naga as well as the giant Buddha or *Lokesvara* heads of the Bayon are likenesses of Jayavarman VII.

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#### Appendix 1. Additional remarks on natural history.

##### Fish species:

Thousands of individual fish are depicted in the bas-reliefs of Angkor Wat and the Bayon. Certainly no one has counted all of them; many are badly weathered, and no doubt some have disappeared. There are well over one thousand fish in the Angkor Wat Churning scene (VUTHY & PEANG, 1999, table on p. 16). Angkor Wat and the Bayon probably present the greatest ancient sculptural display of fish life to be found anywhere. There has been only one previous serious attempt to provide scientific identification of the Angkor Wat and Bayon fish species, that by VUTHY & PEANG (1999). My identifications differ in a number of instances from those in this pioneering work. These have been discussed with Vuthy subsequent to the appearance of his paper (VUTHY & PEANG, 1999) and we are now essentially in agreement on the revised identifications.

While the Angkor Wat Churning and the numerous Bayon fish scenes give the impression of very many different fish species, their scientific identification leaves much to be desired. The main reasons for this defect are 1) crude execution of many fish; 2) liberties in portrayal of fish anatomy taken by the sculptors; and 3) failure to portray accurately characters such as numbers of scales and fin-rays. Knowledge of fish anatomy but also the skill of the artists and the amount of time they devoted to each fish appear to vary considerably. Some of the most skillful and accurate fish portrayals occur in parts of the Angkor Wat Churning, where we can readily identify the predatory catfish *Wallago attu* (Fig. 36) and tongue-soles of the genus *Cynoglossus* (Fig. 37). In these two instances it seems likely that the sculptors or other artisans who drew the fish on stone for the sculptors worked from actual fish specimens (either fresh fish or, more likely in the case of *Cynoglossus*, dried fish).

Evidently the sculptors imaginatively "created" much of the fish diversity in the Angkor Wat and Bayon bas-reliefs by imaginatively varying shapes, relative proportions, and other features. Due to these circumstances very few of the fish in the bas-reliefs can be identified with any degree of confidence to species. The best that can be done is to identify them to family. In a number of instances, such as the elasmobranch family Pristidae or the primitive bony-fish family Notopteridae or featherbacks, identification can be taken down, by the process of elimination or reasonable probability, to the level of genus or, in a few instances, of species. This practice was taken too far by Vuthy and Peang, resulting in most of the differences between their identifications and mine. In a few instances—notably *Bangana behri*, *Wallago attu*, and *Cynoglossus*—taxa they overlooked may be identified. In the great majority of instances the fish can only be identified to the level of family. This is particularly so for the extremely numerous Cyprinidae or carps, the dominant family of fishes in the Mekong basin.

The following fish taxa are identifiable in the bas-reliefs of Angkor Wat and the Bayon:

- Pristidae (sawfish)  
*Pristis microdon*
- Notopteridae (featherbacks)  
*Chitala* and/or *Notopterus*
- Cyprinidae (carps)  
*Bangana behri?*  
*Hypsibarbus* spp  
*Labeo pierrei?*
- Pangasiidae (catfish)  
*Pangasius hypophthalmus?*  
*Pangasius larnaudei?*  
*Pangasius sanitwongsei?*
- Siluridae (catfish)  
*Wallago attu*
- Channidae (snakeheads)  
*Channa*
- Synbranchidae (swamp-eels or smooth perch-eels)  
*Monopterus javanensis*
- Soleidae (flatfish or soles)  
*Euryglossa*
- Cynoglossidae (tongue soles)  
*Cynoglossus*

The two-head carp *Bangana behri* inhabits rocky stretches of the Mekong mainstream no further downstream than Kratie. Its apparent presence in Bayon bas-reliefs of a Khmer-Cham naval battle and of a Chinese junk on a river cruise suggests that these events occurred on the Mekong mainstream above Kratie. For color photos of adult *B. behri*, see ROBERTS & WARREN, 1994: 98, figs. 11–12).

Also of interest are two images of sawfishes, *Pristis*, in the Angkor Wat Churning. The tooth-bearing rostrum (often cut off and kept as an object of veneration or curiosity in Buddhist temples) is depicted with about 16–18 pairs of teeth, as in some living species of *Pristis* such as *P. microdon*. These fish, so easily gillnetted, are now nearly absent from the Mekong due to over-fishing (although they are not targeted by fishermen).

A number of fish species one might expect to find in the bas-reliefs are missing. Thus

we find no images suggestive of the very common and presently popular food fish *Clarias* (catfish family Clariidae). Also absent are any depictions of stingrays (Dasyatidae). There are at least three stingray species in the Mekong basin of Cambodia, including one gigantic species (*Himantura polylepis*) that gets to 500 or 600 kg. They are all relatively rare and seldom caught.

#### Turtles:

While the Angkor Wat Churning and various Bayon scenes depict a considerable variety of testudinate reptiles, or turtles and tortoises, for most of them it is not possible to identify the species. The reasons are the same as mentioned in the discussion above about difficulties in identification of Angkor Wat and Bayon fish species. For turtles also, the sculptors could readily portray a turtle gestalt and then vary it to give the impression of numerous different species, but the figures are too crudely done and lack accurate portrayal of characters useful for scientific identification. The two turtles depicted in the Chinese river cruise scene, one being caught in a cast-net and the other for sale, look like *Batagur baskar* (Figs. 21 and 23). This large aquatic species was relatively common in the Great Lake into the twentieth century. It is now apparently extirpated from the lake, and extremely rare elsewhere in Cambodia. Vishnu's turtle avatar Kurma in the Angkor Wat Churning scene cannot be identified with any living species.

#### Dolphins:

There apparently are no depictions of dolphins in the bas-reliefs of Angkor Wat or the Bayon or of any other ancient Khmer temples. The bottle-nosed species *Orcaella brevirostris* reportedly was common in the Great Lake before relentless persecution by the Khmer Rouge in 1975–1979.<sup>8</sup> It was common in the Se San (the large Mekong tributary in northeastern Cambodia) until the construction of Vietnam's Yali hydropower dam on the upper Se San in 1998. It is still present in the Mekong mainstream between Khone Falls in southern Laos and Kratie in Cambodia (pers. obs.) but prospects for its continued survival in the Mekong basin are not bright.

#### Nagas:

Multi-headed divine cobras or nagas are a recurrent theme of Indian and Khmer art. It is related in the Ramayana that the naga race numbers one thousand, and that they sprung from Kadru, wife of Kasyapa, to people the “regions below the world” or Patala, where they reign in great splendor. Nagas are responsible for guarding the treasures of the earth. They are also associated with fertility.

Naga statues decorate the balustrades along the entrances to Angkor Wat and other temples, and occur on bridges on the royal roads radiating out in all directions from Angkor. Vasuki is perhaps the most important and best known naga in Khmer mythology. In addition to his dynamic role in the Churning, Vasuki bears Mount Meru and the entire world in his coils. He will destroy the world with his poisonous breath at the end of each

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<sup>8</sup>Fishermen of Kampong Luang, a floating village on the west coast of the Great Lake in Pursat district, report that dolphin currently are present in the lake (pers. observ. April 2002).

*yuga*. Also popular in Khmer art is the image of Buddha meditating while shielded from a great storm by the naga king Mucilenda.

The origin of the naga myth is lost in the mists of time. The naga is essentially a monstrous multi-headed cobra. It came to Cambodia from India, where a snake-cult based on it preceded the *Ramayana* by millenia, probably predating even the Vedas. For the early Indian agriculturists who first drained and cleared the land and cultivated it intensively, cobras were perhaps the most frequently encountered large fearsome animals. The Indian king cobra or hammadryad reaches 6 m. Females guarding litters of new born are extremely aggressive and can easily run down a man; their bite is fatal. When crops are plentiful, people, rodents and cobras all multiply. From such circumstances the association of cobras with fertility and the need to protect them may have arisen. But why are nagas multi-headed?

Conclusive evidence that naturally-occurring two-headed snakes were known to ancient Indians is provided by the early epic poem *Suparnadhyaya*. It relates how a blow from Indra's thunderbolt struck the Garuda, causing it to lose a feather. The feather broke into three pieces that dropped on the ground, from which mongooses, peacocks (traditional enemies of nagas) and two-headed snakes were born (VOGEL, 1926: 54).

Many Khmer sculptures of nagas, like the Angkor Wat Churning Vasuki, have stylized heads quite unlike living cobras. A stunning and particularly beautiful exception is provided by a large naga statue with seven very naturalistic cobra heads at Wat Preah Vihear (TAMURA & ISHIZAWA 1999: 68, fig. 58; ROVEDA, 2000: 77, fig 108). Juvenile nagas (Vasuki's own offspring?) are readily identified as such in the Angkor Wat Churning by their small size and single head with Vasuki-like face. Khmer nagas are often shown issuing from the mouth of a *makara*, as in several Banteay Srei corner pieces.

The hooded multi-headed naga provides one of the earliest examples of the syncretism and serial adaptation of symbolic imagery that is so pervasive in Eastern religions. Thus long before the naga Mucilenda shielded Buddha from a storm and saved his life, his ancestor Ananta or Sesha shielded the reclining Vishnu. A still earlier naga shielded the mythological half-man half-naga *Nagaraja* (see HARLE, 1969: 82, fig. 22 of a seventh century AD bas-relief). In the multi-headed naga that so abundantly populate Angkor and the surrounding countryside, are we perhaps being reminded of actual living cobras with two heads that initiated not only the multi-headed naga but the entire pantheon of multi-headed Hindu and Khmer gods?

#### Appendix 2. Jayavarman VII as naturalist and conservationist

The Bayon bas-reliefs include scenes that suggest Jayavarman VII had an abiding interest in nature. There is the elaborate scene of wild animals (including rhinos and perhaps one or two extinct mammal species) in the royal menagerie (GROSPLIER, 1956: 164,168–169). The sacred pond or royal aquarium is full of captive fish. There are depictions of diverse fish and aquatic life in the Chinese river cruise and naval battle scenes; and many other pond, river, and forest scenes with fish, turtles, crocodiles, wildfowl and mammals. There is the touching scene of a young Jayavarman VII (if indeed it is him) raptly gazing at fish in the moat before the statue of Vishnu (Fig. 30).

To the evidence of naturalist leanings from the Bayon bas-reliefs may be added a

quote from an inscription about Jayavarman VII from Preah Khan. The inscription, dated 1191, states: “To the multitude of his warriors he gave the capitals of enemy kings, with their shining palaces; to the beasts roaming his forests, he gave the forests of the enemy; to prisoners of war, he gave his own forests. Thus did he manifest generosity and justice” (after CHANDLER, 1983: 60). The second of the three sentences in the quotation indicates Jayavarman VII established the equivalent of our modern protected forests and wildlife sanctuaries. This corresponds to forest practices in Indian or Kautilyan principles of “Arthashastra” or good governance dating back at least as early as the Mauryan Empire in the third century BC (RANGARAJAN, 1992).

Evidently Jayavarman VII appreciated and cared for nature. He would have been thrilled by the discovery of such stunning endemic Mekong fish as the giant predatory carp *Aaptosyax grypus* and the giant buck-toothed giant goramy *Osphronemus exodon*. The present greatly reduced and impoverished condition of the Cambodian forests and the disappearance or scarcity of rhinos, forest birds, and other animals would distress him.