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UNFINISHED BUSINESS:
BUDDHIST REUSE OF ANGKOR WAT AND ITS HISTORICAL
AND POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE

INTRODUCTION

"Unfinished?" "It can't be!"[1] How could Angkor Wat, the symbol of "Cambodge,"[2] the icon of "Original Khmerness,"[3] and a metonym of the nation Cambodia, be unfinished? Considering that Angkor Wat is a monument built with such a meticulous architectural plan and such attention to perfect symmetry and balance that it even warrants a numerological interpretation of the builders' intent,[4] "unfinished" may be the last adjective that springs to mind (fig. 1). The view of Angkor Wat as the epitome of the glorious Khmer past, a view established during French colonial rule in Cambodia, leaves no room for such an adjective. Colonial representations of the building not only romanticized the history of Angkor Wat through travelogues and archaeological reports, which encapsulated the monument in the heyday of the Khmer empire in the twelfth century or in a mythological time of giants and gods, but also sanitized its image by removing any trace of imperfection, such as signs of use and decay, as seen in a crisp, "scenographic fabrication" of Angkor Wat built for the 1931 Colonial Exposition in Paris.[5] Such crisp images of Angkor Wat promulgated by the French Protectorate government also inspired the abstraction of the architecture into a national symbol.[6] Angkor Wat has occupied center stage in nationalist political discourse and served as a visual symbol of "Khmerness" in the flag of each political faction that has competed for power in Cambodia throughout the twentieth century.[7] Abstracted into a schematic drawing of a façade with three towers, Angkor Wat as seen in today's national flag of Cambodia could never reveal its incompleteness.

1   As a tribute to my teacher and mentor, Joanna Williams, I begin the article with these phrases purposefully paraphrased from her article "Unfinished Images," *India International Centre Quarterly* 13, 1 (1986): 90–104, which inspired much of this essay.

2   The term "Cambodge" here refers to the colony as imagined and constructed by the French colonial rule, mostly following Penny Edwards' definition and use of the term. Penny Edwards, *Cambodge: The Cultivation of a Nation, 1860–1945* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007), 18.

3   The term refers to the nostalgic qualities of the Khmers as builders of Angkor, formulated and promoted by Saloth Sar under his ghost pen name Kmae Daem ("the Original Khmer"). According to Edwards, this "Original Khmerness" not only contributed to the formation of the nationalistic propaganda in post-independent Cambodia, but also established the foundation for the formation of Democratic Kampuchea (also known as Khmer Rouge), a regime known for its murderous and vicious rule. Ibid., esp. 1–15.

4   See Eleanor Mannikka, *Angkor Wat: Time, Space, and Kingship* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1996).

5   Patricia Morton, *Hybrid Modernities: Architecture and Representation at the* 1931 Colonial Exposition, Paris (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2000), 250.

6   Given the meaning of the term "Jetavana," referring to a triple-roofed ancestral temple in Southeast Asia, and its association with Angkor Wat discussed in this essay, it is possible that this image of Angkor Wat had been established as an iconic representation of the temple before the French interest in the region.

7   Edwards, *Cambodge*, esp. chaps. 1 and 6.

Yet this twelfth-century temple, built by a Khmer monarch, Suryavarman II (r. 1113–1145 or later), and dedicated to Viṣṇu, was never finished. Its architectural layout and structure were completed, but the decorative program was not. Reasons for abandoning the ambitious decorative project midway may be numerous, one being the death of the original patron, Suryavarman II, but none have yet been verified. As with the South Asian examples of unfinished images discussed by Joanna Williams,[8] this unfinished state seems to have had little to no impact on the sanctity of the monument and the space.

In fact, the unfinished state may have been one of the primary factors that motivated the building's later reuse as a Buddhist monument. In the sixteenth century King Ang Chan (r. circa 1516–1566) added sculptures to one of the unfinished galleries as a means of claiming his political legitimacy as heir to Suryavarman II, the original patron of the glorious Khmer past. French colonial attempts to mask this later history of Buddhist reuse and to "re-Indianize" Angkor Wat have recently been discussed in the context of colonial entrepreneurship and the formation of nationalist ideology in the much neglected period of the French Protectorate in Cambodian history.[9] But the reasons and motivations behind the transformation of Angkor Wat into a Buddhist sacred space and the manner in which the later users appropriated the monument have not been fully examined.

Thus, the goal of this essay is to explain how and why a twelfth-century Vaiṣṇava temple was transformed into one of the most famous Buddhist pilgrimage sites in Southeast Asia by examining inscriptional, textual, material, and art historical evidence. I aim to address the following questions: (1) Among all the temples of Angkor, why was Angkor Wat specifically reused as a Buddhist space? (2) How was Angkor Wat transformed from a Vaiṣṇava monument to a famous Buddhist pilgrimage site? and (3) What was the nature of Angkor Wat's reuse and appropriation? Reflecting on recent scholarship that proposes a more nuanced and less binary understanding of appropriation and iconoclasm,[10] I try to locate the reuse of Angkor Wat in the indigenous cultural context of reuse and appropriation. I also consider the Buddhist appropriation of Angkor Wat as having a positive impact on nationalist discourse.

PERCEPTION BEATS REALITY

Two reasons behind Angkor Wat's appropriation as a Buddhist space and its emergence as a pilgrimage site may lie in its monumentality and architectural merits. Angkor Wat, with its moat demarcating the vast sacred space of almost 200 hectares (494 acres), is the largest single temple complex among

8   Williams, "Unfinished Images," 90–104.
9   Edwards, *Cambodge*, 132–35; Penny Edwards, "Taj Angkor: Enshrining l'Inde in le Cambodge," in *France and "Indochina": Cultural Representations*, ed. Kathryn Robson and Jennifer Yee (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2005).
10   For example, Finbarr Barry Flood uses the concept of "translation as a transformative process" in explaining the creative and regenerative aspect of Indo-Ghurid mosques and appropriated pillars in sultanate Delhi. Finbarr B. Flood, "Pillars, Palimpsests, and Princely Practices: Translating the Past in Sultanate Delhi," *Res* 43 (2003): 95–116; and "Refiguring Iconoclasm in the Early Indian Mosque," in *Negating the Image: Case Studies in Iconoclasm*, ed. Anne McClanan and Jeff Johnson (Aldershot, U.K., and Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2005), 15–31. See also Mia M. Mochizuki, *The Netherlandish Image after Iconoclasm, 1566–1672: Material Religion in the Dutch Golden Age* (Aldershot, U.K., and Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2008), 104–25. Examining varying attitudes in iconoclastic activities in the Netherlands of the sixteenth century, Mochizuki suggests three variations of iconoclasm: passionate, protective, and generative.

all the temples in the Angkor area. The moat measures more than 5 kilometers in circumference, and the outermost, or fourth, enclosure of the complex can be reached from the western side by crossing a 200-meter-long, sandstone-paved bridge.

After crossing the bridge and going through the central gateway of the outer enclosure, visitors encounter the most iconic view of the temple at the end of another, 350-meter-long sandstone-paved causeway: that of the three towers of the inner sanctuary, with tiered roofs hovering over the massive horizontal structure (fig. 2). Although the inner sanctuary of Angkor Wat is noted for its five towers representing the five peaks of Mount Meru, this simple yet majestic view of the three towers rising above a stepped structure is the one that appears in numerous colonial publications, including draw-ings and sketches done by early French visitors,[11] and in the Cambodian national flag.

While its grandiose scale may be enough to attract anyone's attention, the spatial layout and struc-tural harmony create an inviting environment, especially with its open galleries and the relatively low rise of the outer enclosures. Angkor Wat has a clear concentric layout with one shrine located in the center of a rectangular space demarcated by four enclosures (fig. 3). As seen in the ground plan, the outermost enclosure is far from the main complex and connected through a raised causeway marked by *naga* (snake) shaped balustrades. The third and the second galleries are connected through a cruci-form gallery; the innermost enclosure (known as the "massif central" or "upper elevation") repeats this cruciform shape with the shrine at the gallery crossing.[12] Angkor Wat's spatial layout is simpler and more streamlined than that of Bayon, a Buddhist temple built by Jayavarman VII (r. 1181–1218?) in the center of Angkor Thom, a walled royal city. In fact, Angkor Wat may have had more useable interior space than any structure in the greater Angkor region given the four enclosure galleries and two cruciform galleries.[13]

The structural elements of this iconic yet useable building also contribute to the impression of architectural perfection. Evenly spaced columns in the third enclosure create airy and open space in its gallery. The inwardly facing walls of the third and second enclosures are marked with blind win-dows that lighten the heaviness of the stone walls, while the outwardly facing walls of the second enclosure are filled with open windows screened with slender, grooved balusters tightly spaced to con-trol the amount of light in the second gallery. The play between the horizontal lines of the simple gallery roofs and the vertical lines of the more complex towers further contributes to the balance and

11 For example, Henri Mouhot's drawing shows the three towers soaring over a jungle, reflecting his amazement in "dis-covering" this magnificent sight. Louis Delaporte's engraving shows the exact view seen in figure 1 except for the over-grown vegetation. Bruno Dagens, *Angkor: Heart of an Asian Empire* (New York: Abrams, 1995), plates on pp. 40, 44.

12 I have followed Eleanor Mannikka's system of gallery numbering. See Mannikka, *Angkor Wat,* appendix A. In French archaeological reports, the galleries are referred to by their location in ascending levels of the main compound with-out counting the outermost enclosure facing the moat. Thus what I call the "third gallery" where the famous reliefs are located is designated as the gallery of bas-reliefs (Galerie des Bas-reliefs), and this is located on the first level of the main compound. Mannikka's "second gallery" is thus on the second level, and the highly elevated innermost struc-ture (first gallery in Mannikka) is called "massif central" and is on the third level.

13 Earlier Angkor temples were more massive and mountain-like, and only *prasats* (sanctuary towers) had interior spaces. The temples built during Jayavarman VII's reign do have galleries and interior spaces as seen at Bayon, but none of them achieves an interior space as extensive and clearly planned as Angkor Wat.

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symmetry of the building. Rhythmically ribbed roofs top the enclosure galleries horizontally, while proportionally tiered towers mark the gateways and the central sanctuary.

Angkor Wat impressed not only nineteenth-century visitors, the most famous of which may have been Henri Mouhot, a naturalist who "discovered" the site, but also earlier visitors, including Portuguese and Spanish missionaries.[14] The early-seventeenth-century Portuguese official chronicler Diogo do Couto describes Angkor Wat in the following terms based on a report by the Capuchin friar Antonio da Magdalena, who had visited Angkor around 1585 or 1586:[15] "This temple [Angkor Wat] is one hundred and sixty paces long, and of such a strange construction that one cannot describe it with one's pen, nor can it be compared to any other building in the world. The central body comprises four naves, and the roof of their vaults, *highly decorated*, rises up to a very high pointed dome, built on numerous columns, *carved with all the refinements that human genius can conceive*" (italics mine).[16] The decoration left as lasting an impact on the friar as the structure itself, if not a greater one, although it is possible that the building's monumentality and architectural complexity were too overwhelming to translate into words, and references to more manageable units were made in order to explain the impressiveness of the architecture. A seventeenth-century Spanish account of Angkor Wat by the Dominican friar Domingo Fernandez Navarette further details its ornamental program:

Some say that these works were built by the Jews, others by the Romans; some say they are the works of Alexander the Great, and swear that he came to this place, where, to make known his advent to future generations, he had built *this most sumptuous monument* [Angkor Wat], *enclosed in its courts and cloisters, in the style used at that time, because there is not one place which is not exquisitely ornamented and decorated,* as is now Aranjuez of our kings [italics mine].[17]

Navarette's references to Jews, Romans, and Alexander the Great show the second-hand nature of this account and reflect the common perception of the building at the time. In this account, Angkor Wat's surface is completely covered with reliefs and decoration.

Navarette and Couto are not mistaken about the extremely ornate and delicate nature of Angkor Wat's decorative program. It is, in fact, famous for *apsarases,* or celestial nymphs, who adorn the walls and columns. Those on the walls usually stand with one hand raised and the other on their waist and are almost life size (figs. 4, 5).[18] Those on the columns are much smaller in scale and are usually danc-

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14   B. P. Groslier, *Angkor and Cambodia in the Sixteenth Century: According to Portuguese and Spanish Sources*, trans. Michael Smithies (Bangkok: Orchid Press, 2006), originally published in French as *Angkor et le Cambodge au XVIe siècles d'après les sources portugaises et espagnoles* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de france, 1958). Despite Angkor's status as the jewel of Orientalist knowledge formation in the French colonial enterprise, the study of this so-called "transitional" or "middle" period in Khmer history received little attention until the beginning of the 1960s. Groslier's study in a way marks a turning point in the scholarship on Cambodian history, which began, according to Groslier, with a chance discovery.

15   Couto lived in Goa but never went to Angkor himself. Groslier, *Angkor and Cambodia,* 53.

16   Ibid., 54.

17   Ibid., 97.

18   A more proper term for these standing figures seems to be *devata.*

ing with all their limbs and fingertips bent, one knee raised in an active dance posture (fig. 6). As seen in figures 4 and 5, these ladies were themselves elaborately adorned with tall, ornate headdresses, and the space surrounding them is also completely filled with a dramatic foliage pattern, almost conveying the sense of *horror vacuii*. Intricate floral and vegetal motifs that form the primary units of the decorative pattern transform a heavy stone wall into a lighter, fantastic background from which the *apsarases* emerge and come alive.

But the project of rendering every surface of Angkor Wat this ethereal was perhaps too ambitious, given its sheer size. Contrary to Navarette's report, Angkor Wat's decorative program was far from finished. For example, a door jamb on the second enclosure shows the decorative program halted midway and provides us a glimpse of the carving process (fig. 7). A chevron-shaped foliage pattern with a devotee figure emerging from a leaf at the apex is chosen as a motif, and the artist was working on the fourth chevron from the bottom when the work stopped.[19] He carved all the outlines and started to chisel out the deepest parts of the design but never came back to finish it. An *apsaras* figure on the south side porch of the second enclosure stands in the midst of a decorative background that was never completed (fig. 8).[20] Other *apsarases* on the south side of the eastern outer wall of the second enclosure lack all decorative background, and the stone around them is roughly chiseled (fig. 9). There are also numerous unfinished dancing *apsarases* on the pillars. The extremely busy, decorative frames around some *apsarases* (fig. 5) suggest that the original plan may have been to embellish every corner of the temple with decorative patterns.

The abandoned panels may reflect a lower regard for ornamentation than for architecture. Yet, if we think of the relationship of ornament to structure as being mutually dependent, like the *parergon* to the *ergon,* as Derrida does,[21] the ornament of Angkor Wat, i.e. the carvings on the temple, and the unfinished state of that ornament (*parergon*) may be as essential to defining the monument as the perfect architecture (*ergon*). Although the popular perception of the perfect monument overlooks its incomplete state, that state may have been the very characteristic of Angkor Wat that appealed to those who would reanimate the site in the sixteenth century. Their first recorded act was to complete some of the unfinished business of the original patron. Before we go back in time to the moment of reanimation, let us examine how this perfect architecture contributed to Angkor Wat's emergence as a famous Buddhist pilgrimage site in the sixteenth century. Another early visitor account suggests that by the seventeenth century Angkor Wat was understood as the Jetavana monastery of Southeast Asia and that it attracted international pilgrims from as far as Japan.

19 The blank shape in between the upper group and the lower group suggests that two artists may have been working simultaneously on one panel. Close inspection shows that the curlicues are carved more intricately in the bottom series than in the upper one.

20 Here, too, there seems to be a division of labor: the *apsara* figure is more or less complete, but the decorative frame is only half finished.

21 Jaques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 37–82, as discussed in Patricia Morton, "National and Colonial: Musée des Colonies at the Colonial Exposition, Paris, 1931," *Art Bulletin* 80, 2 (June 1998): 366. Patricia Morton uses this concept to explain the significance of the decorative program in the Musée des Colonies.

The earliest surviving map of Angkor Wat is an eighteenth-century copy of a seventeenth-century Japanese map attributed to Shimano Kenryō, an interpreter from Nagasaki.[22] The copy is dated 1715, and Shimano Kenryō probably visited Angkor a century earlier, sometime before 1636.[23] The map shows a rectangular land mass surrounded by a moat and supporting a central shrine and four enclosures (fig. 10). A cruciform gallery is noticeable in between the third and fourth enclosures. If we overlap Louis Finot's map of Angkor Wat (fig. 3) with this map, the overall structural layout is strikingly similar. The main difference is that Shimano's buildings are sketched as if built in a Japanese or Chinese style.[24] Shimano's map also shows more structures in between the enclosures and two extra bridges on the southern and northern sides. This Japanese map is the only known map that shows the subsidiary buildings, which suggests that they were built with perishable materials for the monastic community residing in the Angkor Wat complex at the time of Shimano's visit.[25] They can still be glimpsed in early-twentieth-century photos of the site, but these structures, especially those in front of Angkor Wat, were considered eyesores by the French colonial authorities and subsequently removed in order to "beautify" the site.

Shimano's map was not identified as a representation of Angkor Wat until 1910, in part because it is clearly titled "Gionshōja." This name refers to the Jetavana monastery in India, a structure built by Anāthapiṇḍika for the historical Buddha Śākyamuni in Śrāvastī, the capital of the Kośala kingdom in Magadha (in present-day Uttar Pradesh). The Buddha is believed to have spent as many as nineteen rainy seasons there, a testament to the perfection of its design as a dwelling for the monastic community.[26] Ito Chuta, who initially identified this map as Angkor Wat, suggests that Shimano Kenryō was probably mistaken about his destination because he did not know any Southeast Asian languages when he got off the Dutch ship that had brought him from Nagasaki.[27] Shimano may have been aware of the location of Jetavana as a Buddhist monastery outside the royal city of Śrāvastī, and Angkor Wat's location in relation to Angkor Thom was a perfect parallel, since it too was a temple outside a royal city. Yet this identification of Angkor Wat as Jetavana is not as fanciful as it seems.

22 Dagens, *Angkor: Heart of an Asian Empire*, 28–29; Ang Choulean, Eric Prenowitz, and Ashley Thompson, *Angkor: A Manual for the Past, Present, and Future* ([Cambodia]: UNESCO with United Nations Development Program and Swedish International Development Agency, 1998), 91, fig. 43.

23 Noël Peri, "Un plan japonais d'Angkor Vat," *BEFEO* 23 (1923): 119–26; Groslier, *Angkor and Cambodia*, 98–99.

24 It is a schematic drawing, but each building is rendered with a tiled roof with upwardly turned eaves.

25 Some of these structures are marked with a Chinese character *si* as a group. These groups are located on each corner of the platform between the fourth and third enclosure. The two groups on the eastern side have five buildings each, and the group on the northwestern corner has four smaller buildings with a stupa (or tower) in the very corner, while only one big building occupies the southwestern corner with a stupa in the very corner. The character *si* can simply mean a temple, but it may also designate a monastic space including a residential building, especially given the modest size of the buildings and their collective nature. Photos from the early twentieth century show that these structures were still in use, but maps made during the twentieth century do not document them.

26 Sukumar Dutt, *Buddhist Monks and Monasteries of India: Their History and Their Contribution to Indian Culture* (George Allen & Unwin, Ltd., 1962; Reprint, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1988, 2000), 62–64.

27 Ito Chuta, "Gionshōjazu to Ankoruwatto" (A Painting of Jetavana and Angkor Wat), *Kenchiku Zasshi* (Journal of Architecture and Building Science) 27, 313 (1913): 10–41.

The colophon under the map recounts that Shimano Kenryō went to Jetavana of Magadha in central India following the order of Tokugawa Iemitsu (1604–1651).[28] The term *tenjiku* in seventeenth-century Japanese refers not just to India proper, but rather to "greater India," which included Thailand and Cambodia in its imagined boundary.[29] As Noël Peri suggests, the term "India" too signified plural entities in sixteenth-century parlance, and some seventeenth-century Japanese documents located Siam (Thailand) in Magadha.[30] In addition, Angkor Wat was established as a Buddhist site that attracted many visitors from all over Southeast Asia by the early seventeenth century. According to a letter dated 11 June 1668 by M. Chevreul, a French missionary who stayed in Cambodia from 1665 to 1670,

> there is a very old and famous temple eight days' travel from this town where (if Our Lord gives me some free time) I hope to go. This temple is renowned among all the Gentiles of five or six great Kingdoms, as is Rome among the Christians; there they have their learned men; and from there they receive their oracles and decisions concerning religion, as we might in Rome. It is called Onco [Angkor]; *Siam, Pegu, Laos, Ternacerim, and other Kingdoms come and make important pilgrimages there*, even if they are at war [italics mine].[31]

B. P. Groslier discusses yet another Spanish document that confirms the existence of Japanese visitors to Angkor in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In his *Historia*, Diego Aduarte reports that Dominican missionaries in Cambodia saw a Japanese pilgrim who came "to worship the gods Amida and Xaca (evidently the Śākyamuni), whom he had heard were born, one in Siam and one in Cambodia...."[32] Here it is worth noting that Śākyamuni is associated with Cambodia while Siam (Thailand) is associated with Amida (Amitābha). Such associations suggest that the identification of Angkor Wat with the Jetavana monastery, where the Buddha Śākyamuni spent many rainy seasons, had been established by this time. The structure of Jetavana as described in the *Nidānakathā*, the introduction to the Pāli *jātaka*, coincidentally evokes the structure of Angkor Wat: the perfumed chamber (*gandhakuṭi*), the designated dwelling space of the Buddha, was "in the very center of the Jetavana and around it were built dwellings for eighty elders and beyond that other residences which were *connected by long halls, terraces, walkways, etc.*" (italics mine).[33] Long halls, terraces, and walkways are typical elements of Buddhist monastic architecture as seen in archaeological remains in South Asia.[34] If Angkor Wat's location as a self-contained "city" outside the walled city of Angkor Thom reminds one of Jetavana, its concentric layout and long hallways connected through cruciform galleries fit the bill for a Bud-

28 The transcription of the entire colophon appears in ibid., 18–19. The French translation of the colophon is published in Peri, "Un plan japonais d'Angkor Vat," 120.

29 Peri, "Un plan japonais d'Angkor Vat," 124–25; Henri Bernard, "Angkor, la capitale religieuse du Cambodge, et sa decouverte par les japonais aux XVI–XVII siècles," *Monumenta Nipponica* 3, 2 (July 1940): 640.

30 Peri, "Un plan japonais d'Angkor Vat," 123.

31 Groslier, *Angkor and Cambodia*, 101.

32 Ibid., 99. Groslier suggests that this Japanese pilgrim might have been Shimano Kenryo himself.

33 John Strong, *"Gandhakuṭi:* The Perfumed Chamber of the Buddha," *History of Religions* 16, 4 (May 1977): 392.

34 Even a cursory examination of the ground plans published in Dutt's study of Buddhist monasteries reveals this feature. See the plan of Jetavana in Dutt, *Buddhist Monks and Monasteries*, 64.

dhist monastic space, especially of the famous Jetavana monastery. As noted in the previous section, Angkor Wat's spacious interior along with its harmonious and balanced architecture were enough to inspire the later Buddhist appropriation of the space. Its physical likeness to the known description of the Jetavana monastery, then, would have contributed to the rapid growth of its fame as an important pilgrimage site in the region. That Angkor Wat could be known as the Jetavana monastery of Angkor, and by extension of Southeast Asia, is not surprising if we understand the self-replicating nature of Buddhist pilgrimage sites.

We find many Indian pilgrimage sites replicated in Southeast Asia, the most famous of which is the Mahābodhi temple of Bodhgayā, where the Buddha attained enlightenment.[35] There are at least four Mahābodhi temples in Myanmar (Burma) and Thailand. In addition, there was at least one other Jetavana monastery in Northern Thailand. Chevreul's above-cited passage certainly attests to the importance of Angkor Wat for Southeast Asian Buddhists during the seventeenth century. The monument is referred to as "Onco (Angkor)" in his letter, and "Jetavana" seems never to be used as its name except on Shimano Kenryō's map. Today, "Angkor Wat" is a politically and symbolically charged name, but the building was not called that until much later in its history. The name originates from the first European visitors to Angkor, the Portuguese, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Its literal meaning is quite generic, with *angkor* meaning "city"[36] and *wat* "monastery," hence "a city of monasteries" or "a monastery which is a city."[37] Given Chevreul's comparison to Rome, it may have been *the* monastery-city of the time in the region, famous perhaps not so much for its monastic function as for the sacrality of its space. But its sacrality seems to lie less in its location than in its architecture.

Angkor Wat is unique among Angkorian temples in that its location is not predicated upon the sacred geography of Angkor, which all other building projects in Angkor seem to have been concerned with.[38] Rather, located outside the royal city without any direct spatial relation to it, Angkor Wat stands by itself and is, in a way, self-contained. Here, I would like to suggest that Angkor Wat's emergence as a Buddhist pilgrimage site may have been inspired more by its architecture than by its location.[39] The place, or the locus of pilgrimage, is usually what constitutes the raison d'être of a pilgrim-

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35 See Robert Brown, "Bodhgaya and Southeast Asia," in *Bodhgaya: The Site of Enlightenment*, ed. Janice Leoshko (Bombay: Marg, 1988), 102–24; see also Alexander Griswold, "Holy Land Transported: Replicas of the Mahabodhi Shrine in Siam and Elsewhere," in *Paranavitana Felicitation Volume*, ed. N. A. Jayawickrama (Colombo: M. D. Gunasena, 1965), 173–222.

36 The word *angkor* is derived from the Sanskrit word *nagara*, meaning "city," and its phonetic change can be retrospectively constructed as follows: [nəgɔr] › [nəkɔr] › [əŋkɔr] › [əŋkɔɔ]. The last form was picked up by Europeans as "Angkor." Saveros Pou, "Les noms des monuments Khmers," *BEFEO* 78 (1991): 217–18.

37 Another name, *Angar Tuc*, meaning "small city," is also used in Khmer as the counterpart of *Angar Dam* (Angkor Thom, or "great city"), but only *Angar Vatt* (Angkor Wat) is known to the west.

38 Mannikka, *Angkor Wat*, 9. This idea is also succinctly discussed in Helen Jessup, *Art and Architecture of Cambodia* (London and New York: Thames & Hudson, 2004), 143.

39 Yet it is different from the copies of the Mahābodhi temple in Southeast Asia. Although their sacrality also lies in the architecture, it is determined by their likeness, being a faithful copy of the original, whereas Angkor Wat's sacrality as a Buddhist pilgrimage site may come from its architectural perfection and the building's antiquity, as will be discussed shortly.

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age site, not the architecture marking the place. However, as Robert Ousterhout points out in his discussion of the reuse and appropriation of architectural remnants in Jerusalem, "in the imagination of the faithful, the architectural frame became [*sic*] identified with and thus interchangeable with the site itself."[40] In a comparable but slightly different process, Angkor Wat's building is itself the relic that constitutes the core impetus for pilgrimage due to its architectural merits and its connection to the past,[41] as will be discussed in the following sections.

In terms of understanding Angkor Wat's identity as Jetavana, one more piece may be added to solve the puzzle. A metal model of the Chieng Sèn Jetavana monastery, one of the copies of the Jetavana monastery in Southeast Asia, survives and presents a comparable example of the original Jetavana's architecture. The monastery was located at Chieng Sèn in northern Thailand but no longer exists. The model has extensive inscriptions, one of which identifies it as a "metal Jetavana-*vihāra*" dated to 1726 CE.[42] Published photographs show that the main structure sits on a high, multi-tiered platform and is of a narrow rectangular plan. It has an entrance on one of the narrower sides and a multileveled roof structure.[43] According to K. Nandakic, the term "Jetavana" had a general meaning in Old Siamese and Mon, referring to "a *vihara* with a *three-tiered roof,* built to contain Buddha images, more particularly *images commemorating royal ancestors*" (italics mine).[44] Nandakic further explains that the use of this term in Burma to refer to any triple-roofed building originated from a belief that the original Jetavana monastery had such a roof. The roof of the model Jetavana has more than three tiers, but if we exclude the entrance porch, we see that the main hall has three superimposed roofs with the central one being the tallest. We will probably never know what the roof of the original Jetavana monastery looked like. However, in observing that the three superimposed roofs were a well-known characteristic of the Jetavana monastery in eighteenth-century Southeast Asia, I cannot but recall the popular image of Angkor Wat discussed earlier, that of the three towers hovering over a horizontal base structure (fig. 11). The style of the superstructure is completely different, but its outline does not seem too different from the three roofs of the model Jetavana, especially if we count the two corner towers of the second enclosure that are now missing.[45] I wonder if this use of the word "Jetavana" to refer to a triple-roofed building might have a connection to the imagined or perceived shape of Angkor

40 Robert Ousterhout, "Architecture as Relic and the Construction of Sanctity: The Stones of the Holy Sepulchre," *The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 62, 1 (March 2003), 5.

41 The idea of "antiquity" or something from the past seems to have had positive connotations in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Cambodia. See Saveros Lewitz, "Textes en kmer moyen: Inscriptions modernes d'Angkor 2 et 3" (hereafter "IMA 2 et 3"), *BEFEO* 57 (1970): 104, n. 8.

42 K. Nandakic, "An Inscribed Model *Vihara* from Chieng Sèn," in *Essays Offered to G. H. Luce by His Colleagues and Friends in Honour of His Seventy-fifth Birthday,* ed. Ba Shin, Jean Boisselier, and A. B. Griswold (Ascona: Artibus Asiae, 1966), 121–32.

43 Ibid., figs. 1, 2. According to Nandakic, there are two tiny lions seated on the second bottom tier of the platform marking the entrance side. Two lions placed on the bottom of an incredibly stiff, narrowly stepped platform are similar to the lions flanking the stiff steps which lead to the main shrine complex at Angkor Wat.

44 Ibid., 129.

45 A nineteenth-century terra cotta model of a Mon "Jetavana" shows three superimposed roofs with two side roof structures flanking the central one on both sides. Thus its roof consists of five structural elements, just as in the view of Angkor Wat showing five towers. Ibid., fig. 10.

Wat. If so, the iconic status of this frontal image of Angkor Wat might have been established before French interest in the region. This, of course, is a mere conjecture, but the prevalent use of the term Jetavana as discussed by Nandakic and Angkor Wat's possible identity as Jetavana seem to have more connections. The fact that "Jetavana" came to denote any triple-roofed structure where images of royal ancestors are kept is extremely interesting in this regard because Angkor Wat's Buddhist appropriation and reuse seem to have been governed by the principles of ancestor worship. Indeed, Angkor Wat may have been a royal ancestral temple throughout its history regardless of the respective patrons' sectarian affiliations.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS OF ROYAL ANCESTORS

The earliest inscription that indicates official reanimation of Angkor Wat in the sixteenth century is dated 8 September 1546.[46] This inscription records the beginning of a carving project under the direction of the royal artisan (*rājasilpi*) Brah Mahīdhara upon the order of Brah Rājaoṅkāra Pramarājādhirāja Rāmādhipati Paramacakravartirāja, who can be identified as King Ang Chan, mentioned earlier.[47] The third enclosure galleries where this inscription is located are famous for their narrative reliefs: the Battle of Kuruksetra (west gallery, south side), the Historical Procession of Suryavarman II's army (south gallery, west side), Heaven and Hells (south gallery, east side), the Churning of the Ocean of Milk (east gallery, south side), the Victory of Viṣṇu over the *Asura*s (east gallery, north side), the Victory of Kṛṣṇa over the *Asura* Baṇa (north gallery, east side), the Battle between the *Deva*s and *Asura*s (north gallery, west side), and the Battle of Lanka (west gallery, north side).[48] These reliefs are famous for their complex compositions and amazing ability to convey volume in low relief so that the mythological and historical scenes come alive on this screen of stone walls. The images in the battle scenes (western galleries) and in the historical procession scenes of Suryavarman II's army seem far from the unfinished condition of Angkor Wat discussed earlier. However, the walls of the entire gallery space of the third enclosure were left empty by the original makers. The east side of the temple was left predominantly unfinished and undecorated on all levels, and this includes the third enclosure galleries on the eastern side.[49]

In the southern side of the east gallery, the relief of Viṣṇu churning the ocean of milk (east gallery, south side) represents an impressive tug of war between gods (*deva*s) and demons (*asura*s) using a *naga* rope, with Hanuman and Ravana as the leaders of each team (fig. 12).[50] Although this panel appears as

46 G. Coedès, "Deux bas-reliefs tardifs d'Angkor Vat," *Journal Asiatique* 250 (1962): 236–43. Coedès converted these two dates to the Western calendar based on the astronomical and astrological studies of M. Roger Billard.

47 Ibid., 237; for Ang Chan's active dates according to sixteenth-century Spanish chronicles, see Groslier, *Angkor and Cambodia*, 10–11.

48 For the full reproduction of these reliefs, see Albert le Bonheur and Jaroslav Poncar, *Of Gods, Kings, and Men: Bas-reliefs of Angkor Wat and Bayon* (London: Serindia Publications, 1995).

49 The entire east gallery was unfinished, and the east side of the north gallery was not finished until the sixteenth century. Most of the unfinished decoration of the pillars in the cruciform gallery is also found in the east wing. The passageway of the eastern entrance shows bare architectural forms.

50 The appearance of Hanuman and Ravana in this scene is unique to Angkor, suggesting an innovative approach to translating the *Rāmāyaṇa* using the local understanding of cosmology.

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complete as it can be, it was not fully finished. For example, the space around the protagonist, Viṣṇu, is still in progress and retains rough chisel marks (fig. 13). Perhaps it was a conscious artistic choice to leave the area around Viṣṇu unfinished to indicate the meaning behind this scene, i.e. creation out of chaotic matter (the ocean of milk), in the center of which stands Viṣṇu, balancing good and evil. But other elements also suggest this panel was not fully finished as planned. The foliage pattern that occupies the upper register of the narrative reliefs finished under Suryavarman II was not completely finished in this panel, giving a sense of more open space above small dancing *apsarases* whose rhythmic bodies fill the air as the process of creation continues (fig. 12).[51]

The panels on the walls of the north side of the east gallery and the east side of the north gallery appear stylistically different from the rest (fig. 14). In fact these two panels are later additions, although the artisans who created them appear to have retained the spatial distinctions outlined by their ancestors, perhaps out of respect for the past. King Ang Chan's reason for ordering this project becomes clear when we read the inscription: "Having assumed the throne, the king, Ang Chan, ordered the royal artisan Mahīdhara to sculpt the panels because the ancient king Mahāviṣṇuloka [Suryavarman II] had not finished two panels."[52] The artist in charge, Braḥ Mahīdhara, was successful in carrying out this order, and the reliefs were ready by 1564. That same year another inscription was added to the gallery to record the completion of the project: "Mahāviṣṇuloka had not finished the two panels; thus having assumed the throne His Majesty Braḥ Rājaoṅkāra Paramarājādhirāja Paramapavitra [Ang Chang] had it sculpted. We have endeavored and finished it in the Year of the Pig on Sunday (Phalguna). The two galleries and the balustrades have been completed just like in the past."[53]

The inscription makes it clear that the king was aware of the original patron, Suryavarman II, who is called here Mahāviṣṇuloka, "the great one who is part of the realm of Viṣṇu." It is important to note this awareness on the part of the sixteenth-century royal patron who initiated the reuse of Angkor Wat as a Buddhist monument, because the popular perception in the seventeenth century and later was that the builder of Angkor Wat was the divine architect Bisṇukar, i.e. Viśvakarman, who was ordered by Indra to build a palace just like the Bejayant of Traitrins (Trayatrimśa Heaven, the heaven of thirty-three gods where Indra resides).[54] As Coedès suggests, the choice of Hindu rather than Buddhist themes

51 Compare, for example, the upper register of the Heavens and Hells panel (south gallery, east side) to this one. Bonheur and Poncar, *Of Gods, Kings, and Men*, 34–35 (Heavens and Hells), 50–53 (Churning of the Ocean of Milk).

52 The French translation of the inscription reads, "Mahāviṣṇuloka n'avait pas encore achevé deux panneaux; lorsque monta sur le trône S.M. Braḥ Rājaoṅkāra Paramarājādhirāja Rāmādhipati Paramacakravartirāja [Ang Chang], il chargea Braḥ Mahīdhara, des artisans royaux, de sculpter sur les panneaux un récit... en l'année çaka huitième (de la décade), année du Cheval, Mercredi, pleine lune de Bhadrapada." Coedès, "Deux bas-reliefs," 236.

53 The French translation of the inscription reads, "Mahāviṣṇuloka n'avait pas encore achevé deux panneaux; lorsque monta sur le trône S.M. Braḥ Rājaoṅkāra Paramarājādhirāja Paramapavitra, il fit sculpter un récit. On s'efforça de le terminer en un-quatre-huit-cinq çaka, année du Porc, pleine lune de Phalguna, Dimanche. Les deux galleries et balustrades furent achevée solidement(?) comme dans le passé." Ibid., 237.

54 Pou, "Notes on Brahmanic Gods," 341–42. This idea is also expressed in later inscriptions. For example, in IMA 27, "Munikusal came to pay homage to Braḥ Aaṅgar Vatt that the great sovereign Indra had established on the earth by Braḥ Bisṇukar for humanity, like the model (*beyajant*)...." See Saveros Lewitz, "Inscriptions modernes d'Angkor 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33," *BEFEO* 60 (1973): 209–10.

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for these later reliefs is Ang Chan's way of acknowledging and continuing the legacy of his remote predecessor.[55] This act draws a direct line between Ang Chan and the royal ancestors who built the awe-inspiring monuments in Angkor. It also reflects a deep sense of respect for the work done by his ancestor. Once Ang Chan had taken care of the unfinished business of Suryavarman II, the site was ready to be used again, this time as a Buddhist sacred space.

The significance of Angkor Wat as an abode of ancestors is also reflected in other inscriptions. Ang Chan's grandson Sātha "restored the building to its past glory," and this achievement is much celebrated in later inscriptions (IMA 2, 3).[56] In an inscription dated July 1577 (IMA 2), a "queen mother (rājamātā)" Mahākalyāṇavattī Črīsujātā is delighted to see her son, the king (Sātha), repair the ancient temple of Braḥ Biṣṇuloka (Angkor Wat), "completely restoring it, and putting it in the state in which it was in antiquity."[57] Another inscription from 1579 (IMA 3) is even more telling in terms of what Angkor Wat meant to the Khmer royalty of the sixteenth century, who came back to Angkor a century after its capital city, Angkor Thom, was ransacked multiple times by the Siamese:[58] "Upon ascending the throne, to honor the teachings of Tathāgata, Sātha[59] restored (repaired) the walls of enclosure of Braḥ Biṣṇuloka, [and] redid the roof with its nine soaring points,[60] which he embellished by covering with gold. Then he consecrated holy relics (mahāsārikadhātu[61]), transferring the merit of these royal works to august ancestors and to the late king his father (varapitādhirāj) first, and to all the members of the royal family of seven generations."[62]

The inscription continues with the discussion of the king's wish to offer his first child to the Buddha. Twelve days after the birth of his first son (in August 1579), the queen, the royal preceptor, the astrologer, and the Brahman teachers all gathered for a naming ceremony to confer on the royal child the name Braḥ Paramarājādhiraj. Following this ceremony, Sātha took him to Braḥ Biṣṇuloka, the place of reunion of Mahākṭtetra deities,[63] great Brahman rishes, powerful spirits, protector deities, and

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55 Coedès, "Deux bas-reliefs," 242.

56 IMA stands for Inscription Moderne d'Angkor. These later inscriptions are left on the walls of Angkor Wat. They were initially documented in Etienne Aymonier, Le Cambodge, vol. 3, Le Groupe d'Angkor et l'Histoire (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1904).

57 Groslier, Angkor and Cambodia, 12. Saveros Lewitz' translates this passage as "J'étais frappé par l'œuvre de mon royal enfant qui, plein de devotion, avait restauré ce Braḥ Bixṇulok de l'ancien Cambodge dans sa vraie forme ancienne." What Groslier's text translates as "in antiquity" is purān, from Sanskirt purāṇa. Lewitz notes how Cambodians associate positive qualities such as experience, wisdom, beauty, and glory with the term "past." Lewitz, "IMA 2 et 3," 104.

58 The idea of Angkor being a site of longing and royal desire as the perfect capital after the royal house's move to the south has been suggested by Ashley Thompson and also discussed in Edwards, Cambodge, 174. Although Edwards suggests that Angkor as a ruined site had all but lost "dynamic political significance," I think its political significance remained current even during the development of the nationalist movement in Cambodia.

59 His full title in this inscription clearly indicates his Buddhist affiliation. It reads "Jayajeṭṭhādhirājaoṅkar Paramarājā-dhirāj Rāmādhipatī śrītrībhuvanādityabarm Dhammikarāj Maguvaṅsottar Mahāparamacakkabattirāj Kambujesūr Surind Tejojay Trairatnamakut Visudh Jīnasāsnādhar Paramatthuppathambakarāj." Lewitz, "IMA 2 et 3," 103.

60 The towers must include both the five towers of the central sanctuary and the four towers of the second enclosure.

61 Lewitz suggests reading it as "sarīrkadhātu." Ibid., 109, n. 22.

62 Ibid., 112–13. The translation given here is based on her French translation of the inscription.

63 According to Lewitz, this refers to brahmanic deities. Ibid., 114–15, n. 5.

Fig. 1 View of Angkor Wat from Phnom Bakheng.

Fig. 2 View of Angkor Wat's main temple from the western entrance pavilion.
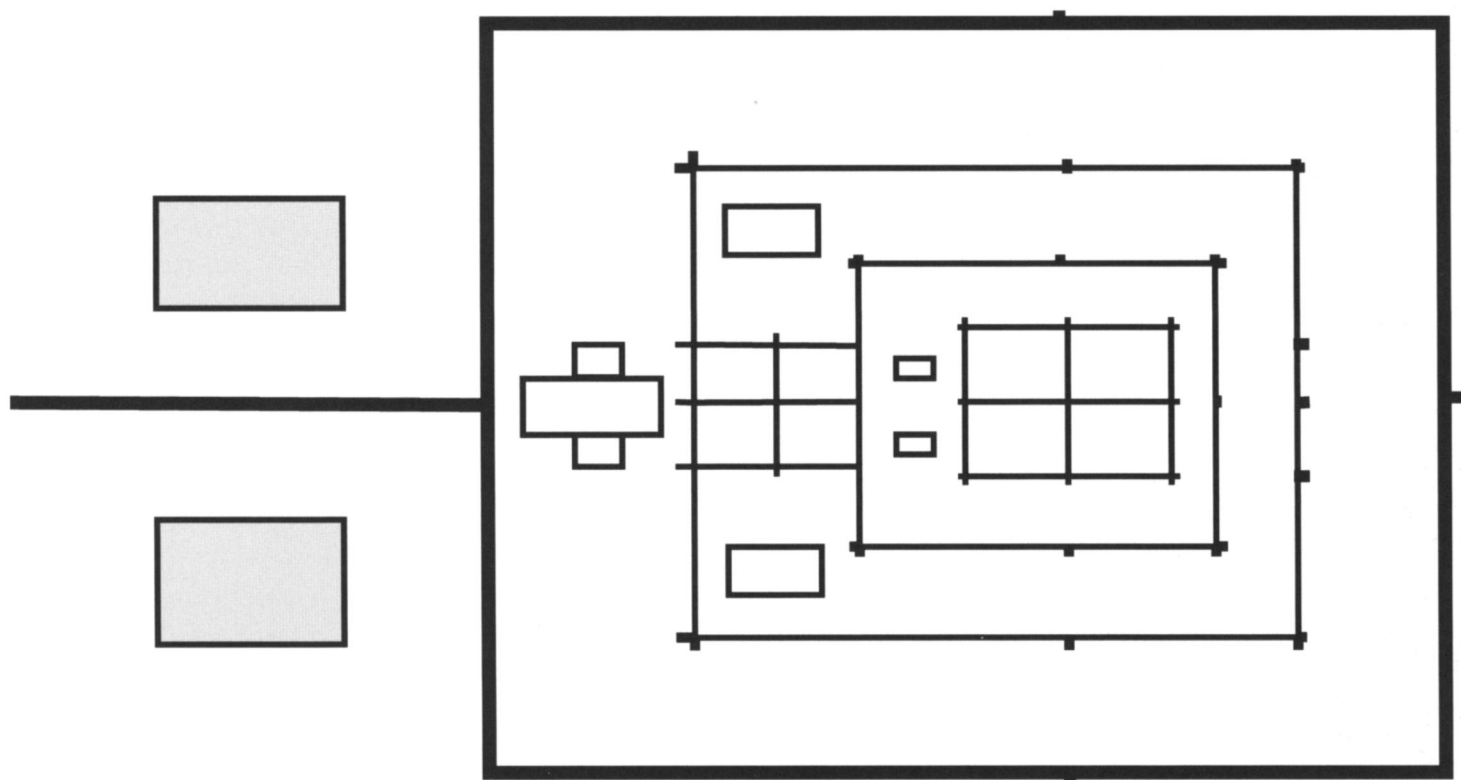
Fig. 3 Ground plan of Angkor Wat. After Louis Finot, *Le Temple d'Angkor Vat* (Paris: EFEO, 1929).

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Fig. 4 *Apsarases* on the wall of the cruciform hall, first enclosure, Angkor Wat.

Fig. 5 *Apsaras* on the outer wall of the second enclosure, Angkor Wat.

Fig. 6 Unfinished dancing *apsaras*,
northern passage of east gallery, first
enclosure, Angkor Wat.

Fig. 7 Unfinished decorative frieze on the door jamb, second enclosure, Angkor Wat.

Fig. 8 *Apsaras* and unfinished decorative panels, second enclosure gallery, Angkor Wat.

Fig. 9 *Apsarases* with roughly finished background, eastern wall, second enclosure, Angkor Wat.

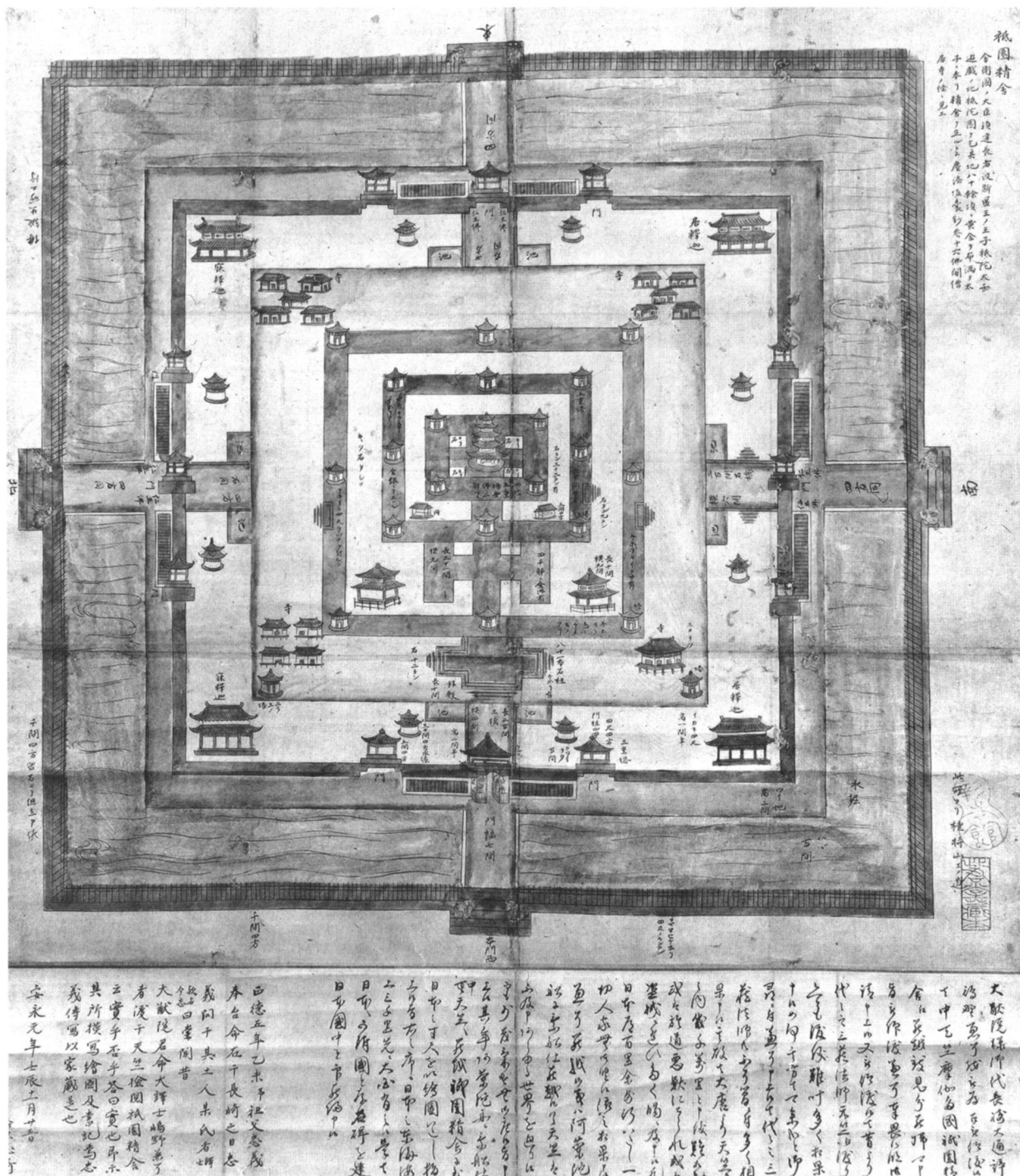Fig. 11   View of Angkor Wat's main structure.

Fig. 10   Gionshōja ju (Map of the Jetavana Monastery), a copy of a plan of Angkor Wat by Shimano Kenryō, dated 1715.
Tokugawa Museum, Mito-shi, Japan. © The Suifu-Meitokukai Foundation.

Fig. 12 Viṣṇu Churning the Ocean of Milk, east gallery, south side, third enclosure, Angkor Wat.

Fig. 13 Unfinished area surrounding Viṣṇu Churning the Ocean of Milk, east gallery, south side, third enclosure, Angkor Wat.

Fig. 14 Soldiers, Victory of Kṛṣṇa over the *Asura* Baṇa, 16th-century bas-relief of the east side of the north gallery, third enclosure, Angkor Wat.
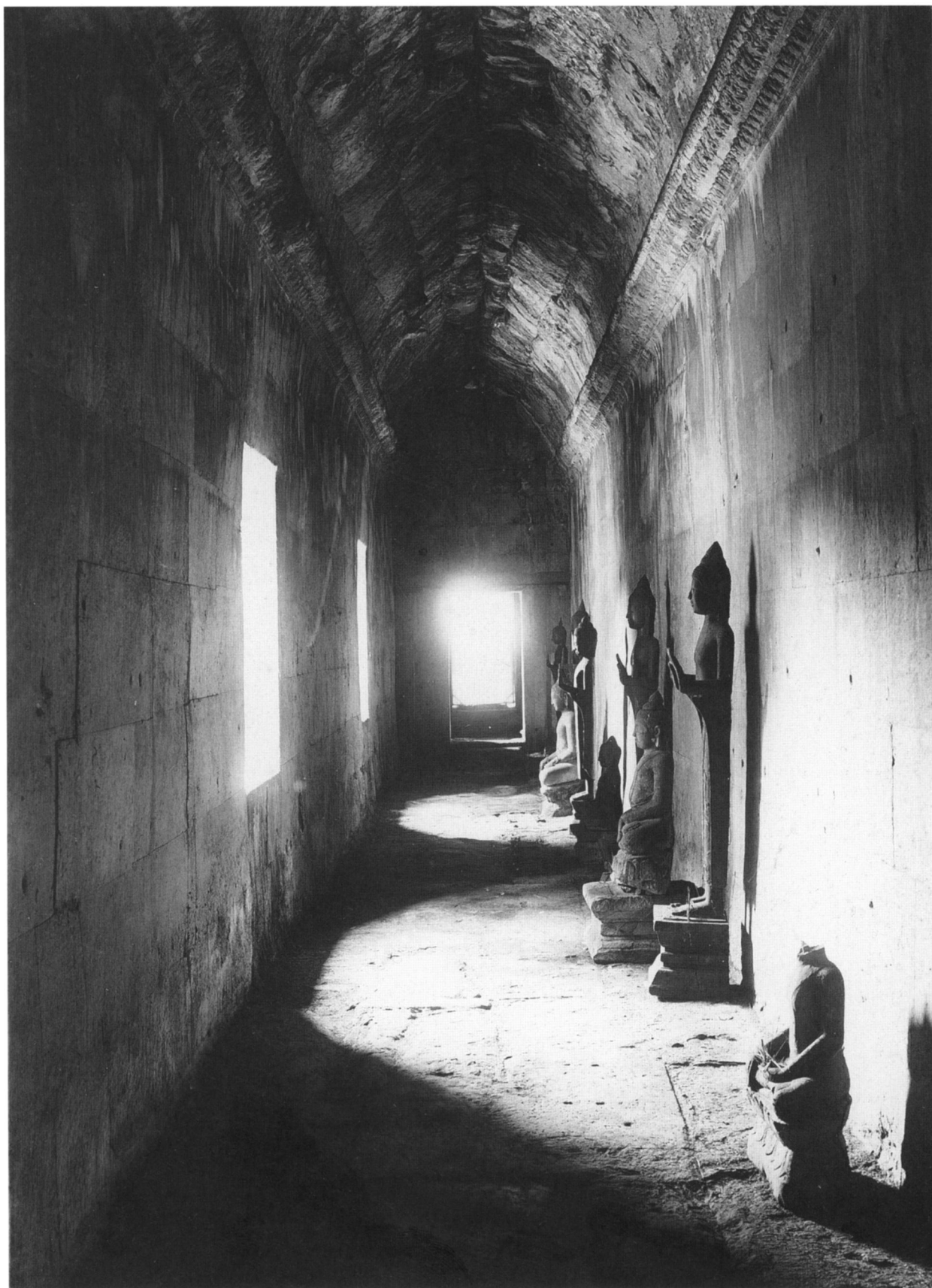
Fig. 16 Buddha statues installed in the hallway of the circumambulatory gallery (south), second enclosure, Angkor Wat.
Photo taken in the 1920s. © École française d'Extrême-Orient, Fonds Cambodge, invlu no. 4832 (Finot 1929, pl. 109).

Fig. 17   Buddha images installed and offered in one of the central shrines, Angkor Wat, probably after the 17th century.
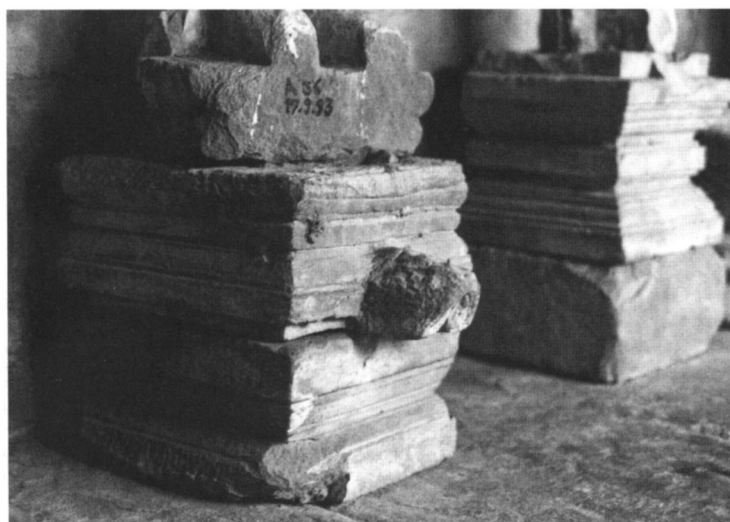

Fig. 19   Upside-down *yoni* being used as a pedestal for a Buddha image, Preah Pean, Angkor Wat.

Fig. 20   *Yoni*-shaped pedestal, cruciform gallery, second enclosure, Angkor Wat.
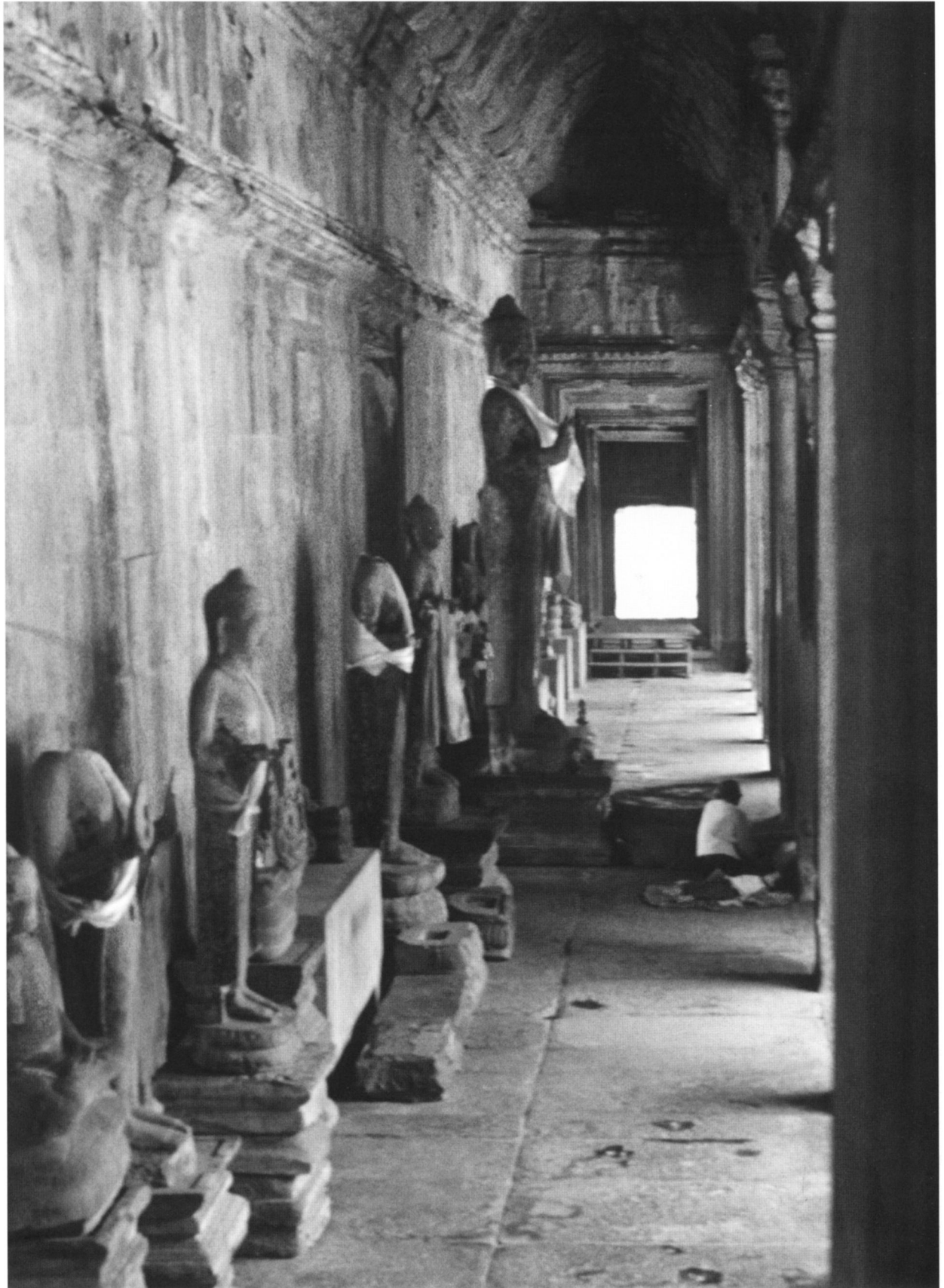
Fig. 18 View of the Preah Pean from the eastern end of the gallery in 2001, Angkor Wat.

Fig. 21   Buddha's feet installed on a *yoni*-shaped pedestal, Angkor Wat.

Fig. 22   Broken sculptural pieces in worship as *neak-ta*, Preah Khan, Angkor.

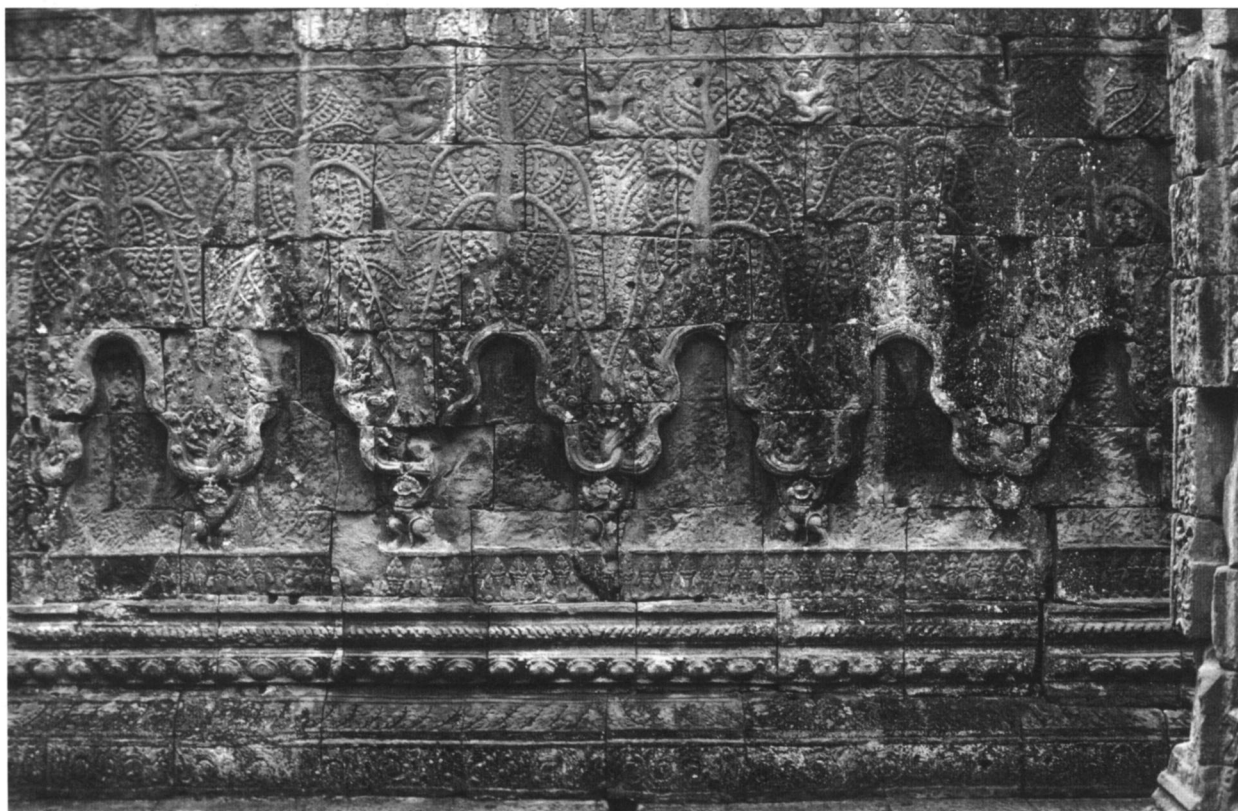Fig. 23 Seated Buddha image recarved into a Śiva *liṅga*, Bayon.

Fig. 24 South side niches containing sage figures (top) and north side niches with Buddha images removed (bottom), "Hall of the Dancers," Preah Khan, Angkor.

Fig. 25 Removed Seated Buddha image, frieze over a doorway, Banteay Kdei, Angkor.

Fig. 26 Frieze inside above a doorway of a hall, third enclosure, Banteay Kdei, Angkor.
Note that the Buddha images are not carved out but are left intact.

Fig. 27 Parinirvāṇa Buddha, reconfigured western façade, Baphuon, built during Udayadityavar-
man (1050–66) and modified during the 17th or 18th century, Angkor.

Fig. 28 Śiva *liṅga* inside a shrine structure (center among the three) removed, outer gallery, Bayon. The three shrine structures may have originally represented three main temples of Jayavarman VII; Preah Khan (with Avalokiteśvara), Bayon (with Buddha), and Ta Prom (with Prajñāpāramitā).

Fig. 29 Viṣṇu in worship, western entrance pavilion, originally in the central shrine, Angkor Wat.

All photos taken by the author in 2001 unless otherwise specified.

"*ranks of ancestors*,"[64] and presented him to the great three jewels (*mahāśrīratna*).[65] It is extremely interesting to note that the accompanying ritual mentioned in the inscriptions is *tarpaṇa*, a ritual of appeasing the ancestors, with twelve *piṇḍa*, a typical offering for a commemorative ceremony.[66] These royal inscriptions suggest that in the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries there was a clear sense of connection to the kings of the Angkorian time as their ancestors, and Angkor Wat was perceived as the place of the ancestral spirits and the Brahmanic past. Although the transformation of its identity into a Buddhist space seems to create a disjuncture, when understood within the indigenous context of ancestor worship, the transformation is not truly disruptive. The way Angkor Wat was reused as a Buddhist space also reflects a sense of respect for the ancestors and past glory. Understanding the original identity of Angkor Wat also helps us locate this later reuse in the Khmer tradition of ancestral (*neak-ta*) worship.

WHAT WAS ANGKOR WAT?

The earliest known historical record of Angkor Wat appears in Zhou Daguan's *Chenla fengtuji* (Memoirs on the Customs of Cambodia).[67] Zhou Daguan visited Angkor at the end of the thirteenth century. His account has been taken somewhat seriously to support the argument that Angkor Wat was built as a tomb for Suryavarman II[68] because he says Lou Pan's tomb stands less than a half-mile away from the south door of Angkor Thom, which is the same distance between Angkor Wat and Angkor Thom. Lou Pan in Chinese mythology is comparable to Viśvakarman, a divine architect in Hindu mythology who is credited as the architect of Angkor Wat in the seventeenth-century epic poem *Lpoek Nagarvatt* (The Building of Angkor Wat), dated 1620 CE.[69] Although cited frequently as a contemporaneous historical source, Zhou Daguan's report does not provide much information about Angkor Wat. He gives us directions, its size, and only one line describing the monument itself: "There are a lot of chambers of stone." He does not seem to have visited the monument, although he stayed in Angkor almost a year. As Paul Pelliot points out, a possible explanation for this oddity may be that he was not allowed to go into Angkor Wat because he was Chinese. Thus, Zhou's cursory description suggests that Angkor Wat was in use in the late thirteenth century, but with restricted and controlled access. If Angkor Wat had fallen into ruins and was not in use, he could have easily gained access to the site. It is possible that it was only open on special occasions to Khmer royalty. It was clearly not a Buddhist pilgrimage site in the thirteenth century.

64 Groslier, *Angkor and Cambodia*, 14. Groslier's French translation has it "des troupes d'ancêtres." Groslier, *Angkor et le Cambodge au XVIe siècle*, 17. Lewitz's French translation reads "des troupes des Pères." Lewitz, "IMA 2 et 3," 115.

65 Lewitz, "IMA 2 et 3," 114–15.

66 The conception of Angkor Wat as "some sort of dynastic shrine" is already noted, albeit in passing, in Groslier, *Angkor and Cambodia*, 127, n. 47; and Groslier, *Angkor et le Cambodge au XVIe siècle*, 17, n. 4.

67 Paul Pelliot, "Mémoires sur les coutumes du Cambodge," *BEFEO* 2 (1902): 123–77. Pelliot suggests that Zhou was a literatus, but it seems more plausible to imagine him as a merchant. As Miyake and Nakamura point out, it would have been unusual to have only one book catalogued under his name in the historical record if he had been a literatus. Miyake Ichiro and Nakamura Tetsuo, *Kosho shinro fudoki* (Kyoto: Dohosha Shuppan, 1980), 3–8.

68 The most active proponent of this theory was J. Przyluski; see "Is Angkor Wat a Temple or Tomb?" *Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art* (1937): 131–44.

69 Saveros Pou, "Notes on Brahmanic Gods in Theravadin Cambodia," *Indologica Taurinensia* 14 (1987–88): 341–42.

What was Angkor Wat when it was built by Suryavarman II in the early twelfth century and during the heyday of the Khmer empire? Zhou identified it as a "tomb." The western orientation of the temple,[70] a unique feature among Angkorian monuments, and the counter-clockwise directionality of the narrative reliefs in the galleries of the third enclosure could be funerary characteristics. These features led to a "temple or tomb" debate between G. Coedès and J. Przyluski in the 1930s.[71] Przyluski asserted that Angkor Wat is the tomb of Suryavarman II, while Coedès originally suggested it is a temple dedicated to Viṣṇu, only later acknowledging its possible use as a mausoleum. The idea of the western orientation being associated with death has, however, been questioned by subsequent studies.[72] Moreover, the exclusivity in the premise of the debate – that it should be *either* a temple *or* a tomb – is not appropriate in the Khmer cultural context of ancestor worship because the deceased are believed to join the divine realm where they are worshiped.[73]

Given Suryavarman II's posthumous title *paramaviṣṇuloka,* meaning "the one who is gone to the realm of Viṣṇu," it is perhaps more suitable to think of Angkor Wat as a Vaiṣṇava ancestral temple than a funerary temple. The presence of the original patron, Suryavarman II, is deeply implicated in the building through reliefs and other symbolic measures,[74] and it was perhaps his intention to build a temple to enable his commemoration.[75] After his death, Suryavarman II was not deified as Viṣṇu, but understood as joining the realm of the divine, as his posthumous title suggests, perhaps as an intermediary between the mortal and the divine, a typical function of the ancestral spirits (*neak-ta*) in the Khmer context.[76] His posthumous title does not seem to mean that Suryavarman II was worshiped as Viṣṇu in the central shrine. His person is embedded within the iconographic program,[77] and the temple as his architectural legacy, albeit unfinished upon his death, in a way signifies his presence. With east Javanese examples from the tenth through the fifteenth century in which a deceased king or queen

70 The building is designed to be approached from the west. The western side of the outer closure is clearly demarcated as a main, "ceremonial" entrance by five *gopura*s, whereas all the other sides have only one each. In her survey of Cambodian art and architecture, Helen Jessup maintains that this western orientation is due to its original principal deity, Viṣṇu, who is sometimes associated with the west. Jessup, *Art and Architecture of Cambodia*, 143.

71 G. Coedès, "Angkor Vat, Temple ou Tombeau?" *BEFEO* 33 (1933): 303–9; Przyluski, "Is Angkor Wat a Temple or Tomb?"

72 There are other temples in Angkor that may have "funerary" characteristics, i.e. the remains of deceased kings deposited within the temple grounds, but these are not oriented toward the west. For a discussion of possible royal interments in Angkorian temples, see G. Coedès, "ñtudes cambodgiennes: La destination funéraire des grands monuments khmèrs," *BEFEO* 40, 2 (1941): 315–43. One theory that attempts to explain this unique feature scientifically posits that its western orientation is due to an astronomical concern, linked to lunar and solar observation at the site. See Robert Stencel, Fred Gifford, and Eleanor Morón, "Astronomy and Cosmology at Angkor Wat," *Science* 193, 4250 (23 July 1976): 281–87.

73 Przyluski's argument particularly hinges upon his own cultural context: "If a Christian goes to paradise after his death, his tomb is a tomb nonetheless, not a divine abode." Przyluski, "Is Angkor Wat a Temple or Tomb?" 142.

74 Mannikka, *Angkor Wat*, 129.

75 The "Heavens and Hells" scene follows the representation of Suryavarman II's military procession, which concerns life after death.

76 For funerary rituals and ancestral worship, see Ang Choulean, *Les êtres surnaturels dans la religion populaire Khmère* (Paris: Cedorek, 1986); Guy Porée and E. Maspero, *Moeurs et coutumes des Khmers* (Paris: Payot, 1938).

77 For example, King Suryavarman II is represented in the panel depicting the marching procession of his army.

was indeed "enshrined as a statue of a god," Natasha Reichle demonstrates that some Hindu or Buddhist temples served as an ancestral temple simultaneously.[78] Although slightly different, it seems plausible to suggest that Angkor Wat was built and used as a Vaiṣṇava ancestral temple during the Angkorian period. Its function as a royal ancestral temple was, perhaps, never really forgotten even after Angkor was abandoned and the capital moved to the south. This aspect, along with the temple's unfinished state, motivated the Buddhist appropriation of Angkor Wat in the sixteenth century.

Although the quality of the sculpture in the two panels added by Ang Chan is often said to be inept because the figures are flatter and suggest less volume, they express the dynamism of the mythological battles through the repetition of simple, more rhythmic forms (fig. 14). It is clear that the later users of Angkor Wat were capable of carving stone walls quite skillfully. Yet these two walls were the only ones chosen by King Ang Chan and his successors to be finished. The unfinished condition of the monument did not seem to have bothered later users. Once they completed the unfinished business of their ancestors, all of the other unfinished parts were left as they were. No other physical modification was made, except for carrying out an obvious legacy, as if they were refraining from changing the ancient edifice.[79] Instead of physically modifying this Vaiṣṇavite space, the later users of Angkor Wat transformed the identity of the building into a Buddhist sacred space through conglomeration.

CONGLOMERATION AS A MODE OF REUSE

An old photo of the so-called Thousand Buddha Hall, or Preah Pean (Braḥ Bān in inscriptions), suggests the condition of Angkor Wat at the end of the nineteenth century. Preah Pean is located in the south side gallery of a cruciform hall that connects the first level of Angkor Wat, where the galleries of the narrative reliefs are, with the second enclosure. Preah Pean is a long warehouse with a "central shrine." If we stand in the center of the cruciform hall facing south, Preah Pean is in front of us (fig. 15). A photo taken in 1896 from the east side of the hall towards the central part shows a pile of random Buddha statues.[80] The place where the south side hall joins the center of the cruciform hall seems to constitute a central sanctuary within Preah Pean where many donor figures, the famous footprint of the Buddha, and other Buddha figures were accumulated, as seen in a photo taken in the 1920s.[81]

It is not clear if this arrangement of all the Buddhist images was planned when Ang Chan took the initiative to reanimate the site, but accumulation does seem to have become an important practice at some later point. In place of iconoclasm, i.e. changing the form of what was already there, we find conglomeration as the mode for reusing this Vaiṣṇava monument in the Theravada Buddhist context. Donors made as many Buddha images as possible to acquire merit and placed them inside the monu-

78 Natasha Reichle, *Violence and Serenity: Late Buddhist Sculpture from Indonesia* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007), 117.

79 A restoration project at Angkor Wat by Preah Sātha, a grandson of Ang Chan, is also attested by the words of Preah Sātha's mother, Mahākalyāṇavattī Črīsujātā. Lewitz, "IMA 2 et 3," 100–6.

80 This photograph, now in the British Library, is published in Claude Jacques, *Angkor: Cities and Temples,* trans. Tom White (Bangkok: River Books, 1997), 183.

81 Ashley Thompson, "Le Cambodge après Angkor," in *Angkor et dix siècles d'art Khmer,* ed. Helen I. Jessup and Thierry Zephir (Paris: Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 1997), fig. 6.

ment, as we can see in another 1920s photos of the ambulatory gallery of the second enclosure (fig. 16). Here we see many Buddha images standing detached from the walls and occupying the space of the corridor. Donors did not otherwise touch the physical substance of the monument.

The case of Bakan, the topmost central sanctuary of Angkor Wat, also suggests this tendency to avoid physical modification of the actual substance of the monument. The Buddha images in the central sanctuary at first appear to be carved on a wall (fig. 17). However, the central sanctuary was originally an open space with four wooden doors on all four sides that housed an image of Viṣṇu.[82] At some point, massive stone blocks were installed in the empty space to create inner walls on which the Buddha images were carved. Other Buddha statues have accumulated in front of them throughout time, apparently donated by those wishing to earn merit.

The names Preah Pean (Braḥ Bān) and Bakan (Pākāṅ) designating these two spaces are known from inscriptions (figs. 15, 17).[83] There are forty-two of these later inscriptions in Angkor Wat and these are referred to in French academic publications as IMA or "Inscriptions Modernes d'Angkor." Twenty-eight of them are inscribed in Preah Pean, thirteen are located in Bakan, and one is in the hall of the east side gallery where the bas-reliefs are.[84] That these inscriptions designate the specific locus where the images are placed with the two names Braḥ Bān and Pākāṅ, when the monument as a whole is referred to as "Braḥ Biṣṇulok" (lit., of ancient Cambodia) (IMA 2, 3, 6, 8, 17), "Braḥ Aṅgar Vatt" (IMA 26), or "Braḥ Nagaravāt" (IMA 17), suggests intentional differentiation between the newly reused space and the architectural achievement of the past.[85] Such specific nomenclature displays a desire to distinguish this part from the whole. The later users of the temple achieved a Buddhist identity for the temple by differentiating their own actions from those of the past and limiting their own space within the ancient monument.

Most of the inscriptions in Preah Pean are on the faces of the pillars between the decorative borders and the floral motives that ornament them at the corners of the square columns. They record the names of people who donated Buddha statues in gold, silver, and wood as well as offerings of banners and canopies for them.[86] It is typical of these inscriptions to record other meritorious acts along with the donation of images, i.e. releasing one's slaves in the name of Buddha's teaching (dharma). The merit of this good action is blessed, and a curse is put on anyone who contests it.

82 Mannika, *Angkor Wat*, 17.
83 Aymonier, who collected and published the translations of the later inscriptions of Angkor Wat in 1899, reports that "Preah Pean," meaning "the thousand Buddhas," was the name used by the indigenous people. Aymonier, "Les inscriptions du Preah Pean (Angkor Vat)," *Journal Asiatique* 9, 14 (1899): 497. As Aymonier notes, Preah Pean is the modern pronunciation of "Braḥ Bān," which appears in inscriptions.
84 These counts are based on publications by Etienne Aymonier and Saveros Lewitz (Pou). There is one inscription on the pedestal of a Buddha statue. Aymonier, "Les Inscriptions du Preah Pean," 493–529; "Les Inscriptions du Preah Pean," *Journal Asiatique* 9, 15 (1900): 143–75; and *Le Cambodge*, 3:282–324.
85 Lewitz, "IMA 2 et 3," 99–126; Saveros Lewitz, "Inscriptions modernes d'Angkor 1, 8, et 9," *BEFEO* 59 (1972): 101–21; "Inscriptions modernes d'Angkor 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24 et 25," *BEFEO* 60 (1973): 163–203; and "Inscriptions modernes d'Angkor 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33," 205–42.
86 Most Buddhist images surviving from Angkor Wat are made of wood. Those made in precious materials such as gold and silver were taken by the Siamese when they devastated Angkor again in 1835. E. Cortambert et L. De Rosny, *Tableau de la Cochinchine* (Paris, 1872), 117–25, as cited in Louis Finot "Origine d'Angkor Vat," *Le Temple d'Angkor Vat* (Paris: EFEO, 1929), 21–22.

The act of inscribing pillars or walls does alter an object or a building, but far less than iconoclasm does. Instead of modifying the religious identity of a monument, inscriptions can simply add their own history. In marking their presence through letters, these donors were establishing a continuity with their ancestors, even using almost identical scripts. Inscribing in this public space, their private memory became part of the monument's long history, firmly materialized.[87]

Many donor figures are installed in the central sanctuary of the Preah Pean along with the inscriptions, suggesting the donors' sense of historicity in addition to their religious piety and an eagerness to be near the Buddha.[88] Kneeling quietly in front of the Buddha with hands folded in front of the chest in *añjali mudrā*, as for example a wooden image now in the Phnom Penh museum,[89] the donor figures accumulated within the sanctuary contribute to the transformation of the space into a Buddhist one and fill it with Theravada Buddhist religious piety, just as today's Buddhist devotees do (figs. 15, 18).[90]

Conglomeration does not imply control by an authoritative rule. Reanimation of Angkor Wat in the sixteenth century may have been initiated by royal decree as recorded in the inscriptions, but the accumulation of images in specific spaces such as Preah Pean, Bakan, and the second enclosure galleries probably happened more or less spontaneously given the individual nature of many other donor inscriptions.[91] The pedestals on which many Buddha images are installed reflect an open-ended, spontaneous practice transforming the Vaiṣṇava temple into a Buddhist sacred space. Many Buddha images installed in the Preah Pean stand on more than one piece of stone. As can be seen in photos taken in

87 In this regard, the idea of a city as a "palimpsest of memory," first proposed by Andreas Huyssen and adapted by Penny Edwards, seems quite relevant. Huyssen explores how a city's physical substance as it embodies past trauma and experience can shape present political identities, and Edwards takes this idea to discuss the function of graffiti in Cambodia as encoding "past desires for future lives." The later Khmer inscriptions at Angkor Wat are not graffiti, although in the eye of the colonial administration, they might have been. Given Angkor Wat's positive presence as a testament to past glory, adding their own layer of inscriptions may have reflected a desire to be identified with and continue this past. Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2003), 101–2; Penny Edwards, "Subscripts: Reading Cambodian Pasts, Presents, and Futures through Graffiti," in *Expressions of Cambodia: The Politics of Tradition, Identity, and Change*, ed. Leakthina Chau Pech Ollier and Tim Winter (London: Routledge, 2006), 23–36.

88 As Gregory Schopen points out, a strong desire to be in physical proximity to the Buddha governs the way in which donor inscriptions and votive objects are placed at a Buddhist sacred site. Gregory Schopen, "What's in a Name: The Religious Function of the Early Donative Inscriptions," in *Unseen Presence: The Buddha and Sanchi,* ed. Vidya Dehejia (Mumbai: Marg, 1996), 60–73; and "Burial ad Sanctos and the Physical Presence of the Buddha," in *Bones, Stones, and Buddhist Monks* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i press, 1997), 114–47.

89 See Thompson, "Le Cambodge après Angkor," pl. 117.

90 Mostly made of wood, these donor figures are considered fine specimens of later Khmer wooden sculpture and are hence kept in museums.

91 Edwards suggests that this compartmentalization was carried out by the French in an attempt to "re-Indianize Angkor Wat," but this is not necessarily the case. The removal of Buddhist objects was carried out by the French, but the compartmentalization of the sacred space happened along with conglomeration, and it reflects a respectful and preservationist attitude towards the past and their ancestors on the part of Khmers in the sixteenth through the eighteenth century. The "Thousand Buddha Gallery" (Preah Pean) reflects the unique characteristics of the mode of reuse of Angkor Wat as a Buddhist space rather than the characteristics of the French orientalist project. Edwards, *Cambodge*, 135.

this century, the pedestals and images are not quite made for each other (fig. 18). Some have protruding spouts on one side, just like a *yoni* made for a Śiva *liṅga* (figs. 19–21). For example, in the middle of the pedestal of a standing Buddha near the east end of the gallery, we see a protrusion on the upper piece (fig. 19). This is a *yoni*-shaped pedestal that is placed upside down, indicating that it has been reused. Some images are installed directly on *yoni*-shaped pedestals that are right-side up so that the protruding spout is clearly visible (fig. 21) It is possible that some were reused pieces while others were created for Buddhist use. In the latter case, the shape of the pedestal may reflect the similarity in the consecrating rituals performed for a Buddha image and for a *liṅga*, i.e. both involve ablution and the need for water to exit through a protruding spot.

Pedestals without statues abound in Angkor Wat today (fig. 20), and many of the Buddhist images still in worship are damaged, missing heads and limbs, and fragmented (fig. 21). This is partly a result of archaeologizing an active religious site during the colonial period. Museum-worthy, aesthetically superior objects were removed from the site and put into museums in France and in Cambodia. [92] The trafficking of Khmer art objects in the twentieth century for Western collections may also have fragmented some of these figures.[93] On the other hand, these fragments may also reflect the nature of conglomeration as a mode of reuse. Photos taken in 1896 and in the 1920s show many damaged images piled together in the Preah Pean. This aspect of conglomeration in Angkor Wat, actively incorporating damaged and fragmented pieces of sculptures, makes it possible to locate the Buddhist reuse of Angkor Wat within the context of the Khmer practice of ancestor (especially *neak-ta*) worship even more closely. Studies of Cambodian religious practices suggest that one of the characteristic features of indigenous religion is animism. Ang Choulean's study demonstrates that stone statues in Cambodia are worshiped not only because they are icons of certain deities, but also because there reside the spirits that can be directly associated with ancestors.[94] In the Khmer practice of worshiping *neak-ta*, roughly defined as ancestral or territorial spirits, we find conceptual and phenomenal assimilation between such spirits and the divinities of imported orthodox religions. Even if an image has lost its original form, the ancient objects still bear spiritual potency; witness the stone statue fragments in worship today at Banteay Kdei and Preah Khan (fig. 22). Here, broken images are piled together on a pedestal, just like the Buddhist images at Angkor Wat.[95]

92 Collecting only parts of a body, especially heads, was a common practice during the colonial period, and the popularized contemporary version of this practice are seen in the Buddha heads offered for sale as household decoration items at stores like Target and Pier 1. Reflecting modern aesthetics, fragments are often more valued as art objects, practically devoid of uncomfortable religious connotations and manipulatable. For an insightful discussion of the significance of fragments in modern collecting practice, see Gregory Levine, "Malraux's Buddha Heads," in Blackwell Companion to Asian Art, ed. Deborah Hutton and Rebecca Brown (London: Blackweel, forthcoming).

93 L. French, "Hierarchies of Value at Angkor Wat," *ETHNOS* 62, 2 (1999): 170–81.

94 Ang Choulean, "Le sol et l'ancêtre: L'amorphe et l'anthropomorphe," *Journal Asiatique* 283, 1 (1995): 213–38; and "The Place of Animism within Popular Buddhism in Cambodia: The Example of the Monastery," *Asian Folklore Studies* 47 (1998): 35–41.

95 The use of pedestals in these examples is of interest in understanding how sacredness is construed in the conglomeration of fragmented religious objects. It is as if these pedestals provided sacred ground for these broken statues so that they are collected and worshiped. I wonder if it may be possible to think about Angkor Wat as a whole as a pedestal charged with symbolic power, like a *maṇḍala* drawn to mark sacred ground, on which Buddhist images are installed.

To suggest that Angkor Wat was reused as a Buddhist space not through physical modification of the building but through the conglomeration of religious objects within the space is not to argue that everything in Angkor happened harmoniously without violence. Nor do I suggest that the Khmers of the sixteenth century were mindlessly reusing the structure because it was a spacious building with a reasonable ground plan for Buddhist use. In fact, the way Angkor Wat was reused was rather exceptional because physically modifying a religious monument, i.e. from Buddhist to Śaiva, to appropriate the space was a common occurrence in Angkor throughout time.

ICONOMORPHISM IN ANGKOR

Reusing religious objects and monuments from the past is not unusual in Khmer history. We find various examples of reappropriation as Brahmanic religions and different types of Buddhism entered the region and interacted with indigenous religions. For example, an image of Lokeśvara, probably made during the reign of Jayavarman VII, a well-known supporter of Mahayana Buddhism, was transformed into Śiva, possibly during the reign of Jayavarman VIII, by removing the image of Amitābha from Lokeśvara's headdress, a typical attribute of Avalokiteśvara, and carving instead typical attributes of Śiva – a crescent moon on the hair and a third eye on the forehead.[96] Reusing sacred objects from a different religion through physical modification like this instead of destroying them, which Ang Choulean calls iconomorphism,[97] can be respectful and may reflect the *neak-ta* concept that stone sculptures from the past are imbued with ancestral and territorial spirits.

Numerous examples that show the transformation of Buddha images into Śiva *linga*s survive at Angkor, all of which are attributed to the official return to Brahmanism under Jayavarman VIII in the thirteenth century.[98] For example, a Buddha image on a pediment at Bayon has been recarved into a *linga* (fig. 23). A Bodhi tree above what is now a *linga* suggests that it was originally a Buddha in meditation. The bottom part of the *linga* seems to be what is left of the interlocked legs of a Buddha image. The original pedestal has been preserved as a *yoni*, in a reverse case to the Buddhist reuse of pedestals at Angkor Wat.

The relief in the "Hall of the Dancers" at Preah Khan presents a clear case of physical modification. On both sides of the eastern walls are small, curved, fan-shaped niches. The south side niches hold sages in prayer, but the north side niches are empty (fig. 24). The niches mirror each other per-

96 Choulean et al., *Angkor: A Manual for the Past, Present, and Future*, 69, fig. 32.
97 Ibid., 67–69. This term seems more appropriate in understanding Khmer cases of reappropriation and reuse of religious objects than "iconoclasm," especially because it happens within a tradition that has an indigenous belief system that can bridge different orthodox religions. Of course physical modification instead of destruction happens in iconoclastic movements in other cultural traditions. For example, the cases of "Islamic iconoclasm" discussed by Flood as "translation" of culture demonstrate how physical modification is undertaken to reuse the architectural parts of Hindu temples in Islamic contexts. Flood uses Homi Bhabha's adaptation of Derrida's notion of textual translation as positive transformation to argue for the possibility of a translated product transcending the original rather than being a subordinate, secondary creature. Flood, "Reconfiguring Iconoclasm," 28.
98 Claude Jacques describes these cases of modification as examples of iconoclasm during the reign of Jayavarman VIII, whom he describes as the destroyer of the central Buddha image of Bayon and a fierce opponent of Buddhism. Jacques, *Angkor: Cities and Temples*, 256, 280–283.

fectly, but the images do not. If we look carefully, it becomes clear that the northern niches were not originally designed to be vacant. The decorative pattern above the northern niches has Bodhi trees, which suggests that Buddha images once stood here (fig. 24, bottom). One possible explanation for their complete removal is that modification was more difficult than simply removing them, because the surface inside each niche was more lopsided and tilted inward on the top part than that of the Bayon example (fig. 23), and the Buddha images were much more elongated and hence less favorable for transformation. Examples from Banteay Kdei support this practical explanation for varying methods of modification. In the frieze over the southwest side doorway of the third enclosure at Banteay Kdei, the central Buddha image has been removed although every other detail has been left intact, probably because its proportions were not as favorable for recarving (fig. 25). But in another frieze inside the hallway of the third enclosure, the Buddha image remains untouched, most likely because it is located in a very dark, cave-like space almost six feet up (fig. 26).

Appropriating religious objects through physical modification was not limited to the Śaiva iconomorphism of Buddhist images during the Angkorian time. Theravada Buddhists who are responsible for the Buddhist appropriation of Angkor Wat participated in similar activities. For example, the upper portion of the western façade of Baphuon, a state temple of Udayadityavarman (r. 1050–1066), was transformed into a huge image of a reclining Buddha, representing his *parinirvāṇa* (fig. 27).[99] Vittorio Roveda discusses another case of Theravada Buddhist iconomorphism in Bayon, where an image of a *linga* was removed from a shrine where it had been flanked by two ascetics (fig. 28).[100] Such a complete erasure of unwanted images may seem similar to the cases of "ritually destroyed" images in Islamic iconoclasm,[101] but it is carried out as neatly as if removing a mole with a laser blade. Instead of announcing the destruction as a virtuous act, there is barely any sign of destruction here except for the empty spaces.

Even these empty spaces do not appear out of the ordinary when seen in the context of the unfinished iconographic and decorative programs at Angkor Wat, where such surgical removal of images was not undertaken. No image of Viṣṇu was removed, even from the many friezes and pediments. A Viṣṇu reclining on Anantaśāyin during his cosmic nap can still be seen in the frieze over the doorway leading to the center of Preah Pean (fig. 15). Such a tendency to refrain from physically modifying the ancient edifice makes the Buddhist appropriation of Angkor Wat unique among Khmer cases of appropriation and reuse. Its nature as a royal ancestral temple may have contributed to this unique mode of appropriation as discussed in previous sections.

99 The French conservation team is in the process of re-transforming the west façade of Baphuon to its initial form, which will embellish yet another page of the history of appropriation and reappropriation of religious edifices at Angkor.

100 Vittorio Roveda, *Images of the Gods: Khmer Mythology in Cambodia, Thailand, and Laos* (Bangkok: River Books, 2006), 431; and "Reliefs of the Bayon," in *Bayon: New Perspectives,* ed. Joyce Clark (Bangkok: River Books, 2007), 308. However, it is possible that there was originally a Buddha image because the composition of this panel shows three shrines, possibly with Lokeśvara and Prajñāpāramitā on either side. These three may represent the main icons of the three official temples of Jayavarman VII, Preah Khan, Bayon, and Ta Prom.

101 Flood, "Refiguring Iconoclasm," 18.

A large statue of Viṣṇu, believed to have been originally installed in Angkor Wat's central shrine, still greets visitors and devotees in the western entrance pavilion (fig. 29). Although demoted from the central shrine to the gateway, this impressive, eight-armed image is worshiped in the same manner as the Buddha statues inside Angkor Wat. A colorful garland hangs from his neck, a yellow cloth is draped across his body, and offerings of paper and cloth banners sway from his hands. Around his feet are offerings of lotus buds, and in front of him, a pedestal has been transformed into an incense burner. It is tempting to conclude that the transformation of Angkor Wat from Vaiṣṇava to Buddhist was a natural occurrence in that syncretic cultural milieu, as Jean Boisselier suggests.[102]

The close affiliation between Vaiṣṇava and Buddhist traditions in Cambodia has been duly noted in the case of the *Rāmakerti*, a Khmer version of the Indian epic *Rāmāyana*, which traces the lineage of Rām (Rāma) not only to Nārāyana but also to the Buddhas.[103] These two traditions also share similar ideas and iconographies in terms of making images.[104] For example, Zhou Daguan describes seeing a huge reclining Buddha image representing his *parinirvāṇa* when, in fact, it was a statue of a reclining Viṣṇu. The Buddhist use of a fundamentally Vaiṣṇava monument may indeed present a case of syncretic religious practice. Yet attributing the reasons behind Angkor Wat's transformation solely to religious syncretism is too simplistic and can be misleading, especially if the term "syncretism" is used to denote a fusion of different belief systems, implying the inability to distinguish orthodox doctrinal differences.[105] In the case of Angkor Wat's transformation into a Buddhist sacred space, it is not a question of the inability to distinguish orthodox religions but rather of respecting the past and identifying with the glorious ancestors who left such monumental religious architecture. Decorative works left in progress, undecorated walls, and fragments of ancient sculptures all come together harmoniously in this grandiose space, animated by both Theravada Buddhist practice and *neak-ta* worship.

Not everything in Angkor changed its identity as peacefully and harmoniously as seen in the last section, and many examples of iconoclasm survive. As with the French colonial appropriation of Angkor Wat, the Buddhist appropriation of Angkor Wat may be understood as politically motivated. By reanimating the most monumental building in the region as a temple of Theravada Buddhism, the religion of the time, the sixteenth-century Khmer kings were making a conscious effort to reconnect with their ancestors in a concrete manner. For these kings, who were constantly at war with neighboring kingdoms including the Siamese, who had earlier driven the Khmers out of Angkor, the success-

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102 Jean Boisselier, "A Buddhist Presence Amidst Gods," in *Angkor: The Serenity of Buddhism*, ed. Marc Riboud and Jean Lacouture (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1995), 134.

103 Saveros Pou, "Indigenization of Ramayana in Cambodia," *Asian Folklore Studies* 51, 1 (1992): 89–102.

104 The association of the two is not unique to Cambodia: in Puri, Orissa, the Buddha is considered the ninth incarnation of Viṣṇu in the popular perception of the Jagannath (a local form of Viṣṇu) cult. Prabhat Mukherjee, *History of Medieval Vaishnavism in Orissa* (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1981), 2; John Boulton, "Review of *The Cult of Jagannath and the Regional Tradition of Orissa*," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 43, 2 (1980): 397.

105 As Natasha Reichle points out, it is problematic to assume that there is "some form of original 'pure' religion" when considering a religion in a non-Western context. Reichle, *Serenity and Violence*, 37.

ful appropriation of Angkor Wat and its "distinguished history"[106] was more than desirable and empowering.

On the other hand, if we consider the power of "hybridity," which as Homi Bhabha and others suggest can subvert the colonial binary power structure, it may be possible to identify the positive impact of Angkor Wat's Buddhist reuse and appropriation on the nationalist discourse. The Buddhist identity that was an eyesore to colonial officials may have contributed to the promotion of Angkor Wat as a nationalist symbol, perhaps more so than the French glorification of Angkor Wat as the perfect architectural achievement of a bygone era. With a hybrid and syncretic appearance, containing both Buddhist and Vaiṣṇava elements within an active devotional space, Angkor Wat projects a Buddhist identity that is perhaps more than real. Presented as a Buddhist temple in a Hollywood blockbuster, *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* (2001), Angkor Wat is the site of daily commerce and where Buddhist monks convene for rituals. It is also a magical spiritual site where the title character gets healed and receives spiritual guidance.[107] Of course, much of this is fictional, except for the presence of the Buddhist monks. Simon West's fantastic representation confirms Angkor Wat's Buddhist identity, but at the same time denies its reality. As the first film shot in Angkor since 1964, Tomb Raider was welcomed by many in Cambodia and was expected to reinvigorate the war-torn country's tourist trade along with the local economy.[108] It did have a positive impact on the region's boom in tourism. However, the film's "post-modern" characteristics, which blur the boundaries between the real and the virtual, were bound to create a contentious picture of Angkor. Perhaps, as a great tourist attraction and a world heritage site, Angkor Wat's Buddhist identity too is being objectified and becoming a part of one giant theme park. How much of Angkor Wat's Buddhist use will be sustained remains to be seen.

106 In a similar but slightly different case, Flood discusses Delhi Sultans' appropriation of pre-Islamic Indian artifacts as an attempt to incorporate "indigenous Indian histories and royal genealogies." Flood, "Pillars, Palimpsests, and Princely Practices," 116.

107 As Tim Winter points out, granting permission to shoot this film at Angkor was controversial at the time, reflecting the poor institutional management of the multinational governing parties of Angkor's cultural heritage. Tim Winter, "Angkor Meets Tomb Raider: Setting the Scene," *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 8, 4 (2002): 323–36.

108 For example, see James East, "Raiders of the Lost Temple: What happens when a big-budget Hollywood film rolls into one of the world's most isolated and strife-torn countries? James East reports on Tomb Raider's week-long shoot at Angkor Wat in Cambodia," *The Guardian*, 8 December 2000; and Alexandra A. Seno, Siem Reap, "Lights, Camera – Tourists!" *Asiaweek*, 2 March 2001.