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TEXTS AND OBJECTS

Exploiting the Literary Sources
of Medieval Cambodia

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Introduction

The corpus of inscriptions from Pre-Angkor and Angkor-era Cambodia constitutes the richest written source in Southeast Asia for the period from the 5th to the 14th century, and as the only body of written documents surviving from the Pre-Angkor and Angkor Periods, the Sanskrit and Khmer epigraphy of Cambodia has long provided one of the principal sources for the interpretation of Khmer medieval history.

Although the corpus only contains around 1400 inscriptions, their contents deliver both abundant and varied data. The Indian-language texts are typically devoted to the praise of the gods, to the eulogies and genealogies of kings or high dignitaries, and to the commemoration of their actions, beginning with their religious foundations. The Khmer-language inscriptions usually address more concrete, administrative subjects, such as donation registers or trial records. Thus, epigraphy informs us about many aspects of Khmer civilisation. The study of the varied texts has shed light on the origins, historical evolution, and main events of a civilisation that dominated Southeast Asia for several centuries and has also provided critical understanding of everyday life.

The evolution of archaeological research has naturally made many other methods available to enrich our knowledge, but the study of Khmer inscriptions remains a highly relevant and dynamic tool in the analysis of ancient Southeast Asian civilisations. Indeed, over the past 20 years, the resumption of survey and excavations has led to the discovery of many new inscriptions, while others have been found circulating in art markets, victims of the demand for Khmer art following the end of the war and the reopening of the country. Digital archives and computer search tools have also been employed to reinterpret already well-known inscriptions. In this chapter we present three recent examples to demonstrate how epigraphic works are interpreted to expand our knowledge of Khmer material culture and of the history of the Angkor Period. Our discussion aims to illustrate the reciprocal contributions of philological and archaeological approaches, to show how objects and texts inform each other and how this comparison can document more broadly the material culture of ancient Cambodia.

The Inscriptions

At the beginning of our era, the first phase of Indianisation went hand-in-hand with the introduction of a South India alphabet in Southeast Asia. Initially used for Sanskrit inscriptions, its use very quickly extended to vernacular texts, in our case ancient Khmer. During the last quarter of the 19th c., numerous rubbings of ancient Cambodian inscriptions were made and studied by several researchers, in particular the French Auguste Barth (1885) and Abel Bergaigne (1893) for Sanskrit and Étienne Aymonier for ancient Khmer (1883a, 1883b). Their work, which laid the foundations of our knowledge of ancient Cambodia and notably proposed the first royal genealogies, was followed and refined by that of George Cœdès, who published most of the available texts in the *Inscriptions du Cambodge (IC)* (1937–1966) until 1968, then by Claude Jacques (Jacques et al. 2007), Saveros Pou (Pou 1989, 2001, 2011), Philip Jenner (<http://sealang.net/oldkhmer/text.htm>), and so on. The *Corpus des inscriptions Khmères* research program (cf. n. 1) is today striving to continue this process, to coordinate Khmer epigraphic research, and to keep the digital inventory and text corpus up to date.

The corpus of Khmer inscriptions is generally divided into two parts: texts inscribed in Sanskrit verse, often of remarkably high literary quality and devoted essentially to the ‘great history’, starting with the eulogies of the gods, sovereigns and dignitaries, and texts in ancient Khmer (or ‘old Khmer’) that provide more administrative data, such as donation lists, trial reports, land transfers, and so on (see Lustig et al. 2023, this volume).

This division of content provides a fairly accurate idea of the core of the Khmer epigraphic corpus, but it remains simplistic and masks its richness, complexity, and diversity. First, this separation is not clear cut. One only needs to acknowledge the corpus of Jayavarman VII (1181–1218) to recognise that some property lists were written in Sanskrit, such as in the inscription of Ta Prohm (K. 273; Cœdès 1906), and an early 10th-century inscription of Īśānavarman II (K. 1320), published recently, includes a long versified list in Sanskrit of annual taxes (Jacques and Goodall 2014). Conversely, inscription K. 227 proves that ancient Khmer was also used to tell the story of the kingdom (Lowman 2012). Khmer texts were obviously only rarely engraved on stone, with the majority of texts—like the later Royal Chronicles—written on long-lost palm-leaf manuscripts.

Our examination of the role of epigraphy in the Angkorian World presents the reader with two important contrasts. First, we have chosen to present two Pre-Angkorian and one Angkorian inscriptions. The first two seem somewhat beyond the temporal scope of this book, but even if the language and certain customs clearly evolved at the turn of the 8th century, these texts address the same themes as the later inscriptions and make it possible to underline the coherence of the entire medieval Khmer epigraphic corpus between the 5th and 14th centuries. Second, while the majority of extant inscriptions are found in stone, we choose to evaluate the importance of lesser-known texts inscribed on portable objects.

When the Text Provides Information About the Object It Is Written On

A significant number of engraved utensils in ceramic have been recovered, but the majority are in bronze, gold, or silver. The inscriptions on their surfaces were made in repoussé or directly in the wax before melting (see Soutif 2009, 594; Estève and Vincent 2010, 147–48; Estève 2011). Until recently, most of the known inscribed objects belonged to the Angkor Period, with a significant quantity attributed to the reign of King Jayavarman VII. These are generally ‘commemorative inscriptions’, appearing as short texts memorialising the donation of the object

bearing it and specifying the date of donation and the name of the divinity to whom it was offered. With few variations, the text always follows a typical formula in Khmer: ‘[date in *śaka* era], donation (*jamnvan*) from [Name of the donor] to [Name of the divinity]’ (Gerschheimer and Vincent 2010, 111, n. 13).

The oldest inscription on a metal object published to date—a bronze vase discovered on the art market—is dated to 1007 CE (Soutif 2009, 598). This example proves that this use is not specific to the 12th century and that the rarity of older inscribed objects is probably related to the fact that the materials used for these artefacts were both precious and recyclable. Nevertheless, even this vase is a relatively recent example if we consider that the temporal breadth of the Khmer epigraphic corpus stretches back into the 5th century CE. However, two Pre-Angkorian inscriptions on metal have recently been reported and attest to the age of such objects as media for epigraphy. The first is inscription K. 1264, discovered in Laos (Ban Nong Hua Thong village, Savannakhet province). This bowl formed part of a treasure trove of precious metal objects made of gold, silver, gold-plated silver, bronze, and pearls, including also two silver plates bearing Angkorian inscriptions K. 1262 and K. 1263 (Lorrillard 2010–11, 242–43). The text is engraved on a silver bowl and reports a donation to Śiva. This text differs from later examples. First, the date (7th–8th c.) is not specified, and we can only estimate it on the basis of palaeographical analysis. In addition, it commemorates the donation of the object as well as the donation of livestock, land, slaves, and so on. Moreover, the wording does not correspond to the ‘classical’ formula that we have mentioned, since the text consists of a Sanskrit stanza (Dominic Goodall, pers. comm. February 2019).

The second inscription, K. 1294, is inscribed on a silver vase with a rounded belly surmounted by a high single-rim neck (Figure 2.1a).¹ An easily decipherable Sanskrit stanza (*indravajrā*) is engraved deeply on the wall of the vase in a flexible, clearly Pre-Angkorian style of writing.

In addition, a word in old Khmer is readable on the neck of the vase just under the rim (Figure 2.1b). It seems that this word was not written by the same hand, or, if it was, it was written with much less care:

K. 1294.1²

sarvvakṣitīśārcitaśāsanaśrī-
r vrahmakṣitīśaḥ kṣatadoṣapakṣaḥ
kṣoṇīpatīś śrījayavarmmanāmā
śrīkāmaraṅge dita raupyakumbham | |

The king, by name Jayavarman, the splendour of whose edicts was venerated by all [other] kings, who was both Brahmin and Kṣatriya, who destroyed the enemies that were the problems [in the kingdom]³ gave a silver pot to Śrī Kāmaraṅga.

K. 1294.2

ckāp

Ckāp is a *hapax legomenon*: it is the first and only occurrence of this word in the Khmer corpus. Its meaning is not understood at this time.⁴

This donative inscription, although brief, provides important data from both a historical and a religious point of view. First, it offers the advantage of naming the donor, a king named



Figure 2.1 Silver vase with inscription (K. 1294): a) entire vessel max. diameter 21 cm; min. diameter 12 cm; height 22 cm (Photo J. Estève & D. Soutif); b) detail of K. 1294 text, (upper) symbol on neck and (lower) complete stanza around vase.

Source: (Photo C. Pottier).

Jayavarman. The question then becomes: to which Jayavarman does it refer? The forms of the letters indicate that this is a Pre-Angkorian text, and this name was coined by early rulers in Cambodia: Jayavarman I (652–end of 7th); Jayavarman I *bis*, whose existence has sometimes been called into question (see Goodall 2015, 75–78, 76, n. 15–18), but whose reign is now attested in at least three inscriptions dating from 763 CE (K. 1236; Goodall 2015) and 770 CE (K. 103 and K. 134; *IC* V, 33 and *IC* II, 92); and Jayavarman II, whose reign (?–ca 839) was marked in 802 by a ceremony intended to maintain Cambodia’s independence from Javā—a key historical turning point that conventionally defines the beginning of the Angkor Period (Cœdès and Dupont 1943, 109).

The relatively archaic nature of the characters would rule out Jayavarman II and suggests instead that Jayavarman I *bis* donated the bowl, even if the palaeographical dates are still questionable. However, the distinction is delicate with regard to the first two kings, especially since we have few documents attributed to Jayavarman I *bis*, and both the brevity and the cursive writing of K. 1294 do not facilitate easy comparison. In addition, this inscription is engraved on metal and not on stone like the other texts attributed to Jayavarman I *bis*, which could explain discrepancies in the palaeography.

Returning to the text, two of the expressions used to praise the king provide interesting clues to identify him.

A king ‘at the same time Brahmin and Kṣatriya’ . . .

We are told that this king was *brāhmacṣiṅśa*. There is no other occurrence of this particular compound within the inscriptions, but it is interesting to compare it with similar expressions employed to describe sovereigns. This qualification is indeed far from common, but it is sometimes used to designate certain high dignitaries, starting with Yajñavarāha, the famous founder of Banteay Srei in the 10th c. (*cf.* for example K. 619N, st. X; Finot 1928, 53).⁵ The corpus gives only a few examples of comparable titles. The 10th-century inscriptions from the East Mebon (K. 528, st. X; Finot 1925, 312, 332) and Pre Rup (K. 806, st. VIII; *IC* I, 78) describe Rājendravarman’s line of descent by the compound *vrahmacṣatra* (= *brahmacṣatra*). However, when considered in the singular, only three occurrences describe monarchs in a comparable manner, and they are all Pre-Angkorian. The first such king is also entitled *brahmacṣatra*, in the inscription K. 134 (st. I), a text that led Cœdès to suppose the existence of Jayavarman I *bis* (*IC* II, 92). As for the expressions *dvijaṣatra* and *vipraṣatra*, they are both found in the inscription K. 1417 (A, st. VI and B, st. III), still unpublished and which unfortunately provides no date. Dominic Goodall, who has worked on this inscription, attributes it to the same reign, particularly because of its palaeographic parallels with the inscription K. 1236, the best preserved of the three dated inscriptions attributed to this king (pers. comm. January 2019).⁶

. . . and ‘whose edicts were revered by all the other kings’.

To our knowledge, the mention that other kings have honoured the edicts of a sovereign is not common in eulogies, and specifically not with the wording in our inscription (*sarvvaṣiṅśārcitaśāsana*). Only two formulas are quite similar: in K. 1236, st. VIII we see the use of *rājanyārcitaśāsana*, ‘There is a king . . ., with a radiance equal to that of the king of the kings, called Śrī-Jayavarman, whose commands are venerated by princes’ Goodall 2015, 76), and in K. 447, st. V *praṇatānekabhūmipārcitaśāsana*: ‘whose commands are respected by countless bowing kings’ (*IC* II, 193).

As mentioned, these two occurrences are also Pre-Angkorian, but if the first can be attributed to Jayavarman I *bis*, the second, which is dated to 657, belongs to the reign of Jayavarman I.

At best, it may be noted that in the inscription attributable to Jayavarman I bis, this mention of sovereign pre-eminence appears in a set of stanzas playing on an alliteration of *ka* (Goodall 2015, 76–77, n. 20), a stylistic trait also used in the stanza from inscription K. 1294. Unfortunately, the evolution of Sanskrit poetic practices in ancient Cambodian texts is still poorly understood and can only provide tenuous support for dating such a text. While the evidence gathered previously does not permit any definitive temporal association, we favour the hypothesis that the bowl was donated during the reign of Jayavarman I bis and therefore to the second half of the 8th century.

Knowledge of the origin of this vase would have greatly assisted in identifying the sovereign, even if the areas of influence of Pre-Angkorian kings remain difficult to define. While the bowl was looted from an unknown site, it bears the name of the beneficiary—a deity named Śrī Kāmarāṅga—that could provide clues, since this god was most likely associated with a specific place. The word *kāmarāṅga* refers to the starfruit tree (*Averrhoa carambola*), a well-documented plant in Southeast Asia and common toponym in the Indianised world. According to Griffiths, *Kāmarāṅga* is a vernacular form of Sanskrit *Karmaraṅga* that also appears as a toponym in inscriptions of Arakan (Griffiths 2015, 301–08).⁷ In ancient Cambodia, a city of this name is mentioned in K. 56 of Kdei Ang, a 9–10th century inscription located in the southern Cambodian province of Prei Veng (st. XXVII; IC VII, 10). This correlation suggests that it is in fact a theonym, by which the name of a divinity is derived from the name of the place it resides, which in this instance is a particular kind of tree. Such a specific link is not surprising, as the toponyms of ancient Cambodia are, as elsewhere in Southeast Asia, often based on the presence of notable topographical, hydrographic, or botanical elements. What makes this inscription unique is that god names in the Pre-Angkor Period usually do not employ toponyms, and for this period, one would expect a compound ending with °śā or °śvara: ‘the Lord of Kāmarāṅga’. This inscription may represent an early example of the common convention in the Angkorian era when toponymic titles increase in frequency, particularly for the gods who receive the title *Kamrateṅ Jagat*, ‘lord of the World’, which clearly links the god with a locus (a place). An example of this is seen in the Kamrateṅ Jagat Vnañ Ruñ associated with Liṅgapura (Wat Phu) (Estève 2018, 171).

Given that K. 56 is the only Khmer inscription to mention this toponym/theonym, it is tempting to argue that its place of discovery corresponds with its geographic location. This relatively straightforward answer is complicated by the fact that the text mentions many other donations in the cities of Madhavapura, Viṣṇupura, and especially Yaśodharapura, today’s Angkor, this latter being located in northern Cambodia (st. XXIV, XXV, XXI, *ibid.*). It is therefore impossible, at this stage, to specify where the Pre-Angkorian city named Kāmarāṅga in K. 1294 was and if it corresponds to the city mentioned in K. 56. It is essential to try to identify the god named Śrī Kāmarāṅga, the recipient of the bowl, but this would require a thorough study of Indian sources that cannot be examined within the scope of this chapter. We can point out that the inscription K. 56 refers to this toponym in the following terms: ‘In the city named Kāmarāṅga . . . , he completed [the temple or image] of the enemy of Mura [Kṛṣṇa]’. The inscription thus suggests that the donation was made in favour of a Vaiṣṇava sanctuary, as the Vaiṣṇava theonyms ending in °raṅga are attested in the South of India because of the influence of the vast Viṣṇu temple known as Śrīraṅga on an island in the Kāverī River beside Tiruchirappalli.

The Artefact

Although the undated Sanskrit Pre-Angkorian inscription K. 1294 shares similarities with the inscription discovered in Laos mentioned previously (K. 1264), the text contains a significant difference in that it commemorates the donation of the vase itself and not the many items

essential to the functioning of a religious foundation. This practice more closely resembles inscriptions found on metal objects of the Angkorian era and requires an examination of what the text actually tells us about the medium on which it was engraved. The inscription describes the vessel as *raupyakumbha*, ‘a silver vase’, or, more precisely ‘a silver’ (*raupya*) ‘jar, pitcher, water-pot, ewer, small water-jar’ (*kumbha*; Monier-Williams 1899, *s.v.*). It may have simply formed part of the treasure of the temple, but it could also designate an object assigned to a specific ritual use, in this case solemn bathing ceremonies.

Hélène Brunner-Lachaux described such jars as playing an important role in the solemn baths of the god:

The term *śivakumbha*, sometimes reduced to *kumbha* (or *kalaśa*, or *ghaṭa*) when there is no ambiguity possible, is a technical term that refers to a pot full of water representing Śiva during certain ceremonies. Different substances (gold, etc.) are put in water and the vase is prepared in a special way. The *śivakumbha* is accompanied by a smaller vase, usually with a neck, which is prepared in the same way: the *vardhanī*.

(1968, 58, n. 4)

Interestingly, the term *ghaṭa* never appears in the lists of offerings to Khmer gods, and they were apparently rarely if ever employed in the ritual tradition imported into Cambodia. Such vases are indeed offered to Śiva in the foundation stele of Preah Ko (K. 713, st. XXX; 889 CE; *IC I*, 21, 27) and Bakong (K. 826, st. XXXIX; 881 CE; *IC I*, 33), but the text provides no information on their intended uses.

In the inventories of ritual objects in Khmer inscriptions, it is the term *kalaśa* that is most often used to designate the vases intended to pour water daily on the divinities. The bath serves as one of the *upacāra*, ‘the acts of civility’ making up the suite of daily rituals offered to the deities, a tradition well documented in Cambodia since the Pre-Angkor Period (Soutif 2009, 180–81, 256). On the other hand, we have only found one occurrence of *kumbha*, more precisely of the compound *tāmrakumbha*, or ‘a copper jar’ (K. 669C, l. 24; 10th c.; *IC I*, 170). Curiously, it appears in an inscription providing a list devoted to cult objects classified by material in the section preceded by the header *nā laṅgau*, ‘in copper’. However, the stipulation of the material, *tāmrā*, in the compound remains indecipherable.

This ‘pleonasm’ (*laṅgau/tāmrā*) and the fact that we only find one occurrence of *kumbha* lead us to argue that it was not a mere jar but a cult object. We think that the compound *tāmrakumbha* was either used because it was known by this name *and* the exact meaning of the compound did not matter or to accentuate the materiality of the bowl for specific ritual reasons. According to the *Dīptāgama*, there are four graded materials for Śiva’s *kumbha*: gold, silver, copper, and earth (Dagens et al. 2007, 584).

Daily ritual during Pre-Angkorian Cambodia adhered faithfully to Indian traditions, a phenomenon enabled by the emergence in India of a strong Tantric tradition that, among other consequences, facilitated the dissemination of Indian normative texts between the beginning of the 5th and the end of the 8th centuries (Soutif 2009, 179, 194). In the inventories, the presence of *vardhanī* (*ibid.* 259) provides a good example of the conformity of Khmer ritual with this standard. *Vardhanī* refers to the second vase of the solemn bath ritual mentioned by Brunner-Lachaux, but it is mentioned several times alongside ewers and vases linked to the bath in lists where the objects seem to be grouped by ritual and not by material, like the vase of our study. This correlation confirms the identification of our vase as a specific ritual object.

The presence of the Khmer word *ckāp*, which is currently untranslatable, provides an additional clue. We have already noted that the vase had to be ‘prepared in a special way’ and that

different ingredients, precisely listed in the ritual treaties, had to be added to the water. Indeed, as Bhatt explains:

The pots are covered on all sides except the mouth with a net-like texture made of cotton thread, into which are put fragrant material, gems, grains, etc. Their mouth is covered with tender mango leaves. Coconuts are placed on the top. They are then clad with garments and decorated. A lotus design is made on the altars, plantain leaves are placed over them, in which paddy and other grains are spread. The pots are placed on them and they are filled up with water with proper rituals.

(1993–94, 75; see Figure 2.2)



Figure 2.2 *Śivakumbha* prepared for a *dīkṣā* (initiation) in Cuddalore, India.

Source: (Photo N. Ramaswamy).

It seems that the presence of an isolated and vernacular word (*ckāp*) could express technical information related to the content that this vase was to receive or to the ornamentation described by Bhatt. Thus, this *hapax* further suggests that it was indeed related to the ceremonies of the solemn bathing of the god.

Brunner-Lachaux's description of the vessel could indicate that this object was dedicated solely to a Śaiva foundation, thus settling the identity of Śrī Kāmarāṅga as a manifestation of Śiva. However, it is important to note that both the daily bath and baths of an exceptional nature also characterise Vaiṣṇava traditions (*cf.*, for example, Colas 1997, 316, 340). There is a comparable use in the royal ritual, which is not surprising given that the service of a god in his temple is equivalent to that of the king in his palace. The terms *kumbha* and *kalaśa* are used several times in Sanskrit inscriptions referring to the coronation of the king, which can be understood as the equivalent of the consecration of a religious statue (e.g. K. 989, st. XIV, about Jayavīravarma's in 1002; IC VII, 173) or periodic libations, as in the case of Rājendravarman's use of 100 *kalaśa* each month of *Puṣya* (K. 806, st. LXVI; 961 CE; IC I, 84).

While there are still uncertainties regarding the name of the city and the meaning of the *hapax*, the inscription already provides us with information about the date and function of this silver vase. Unfortunately, the fact that the context of the vase remains unknown and its lower part is lost prevent a full interpretation of this important artefact.

When the Object Informs the Text

The publication of an inscription engraved on a cult object obviously requires a careful examination of the medium as well as the context of its discovery, which is all too rare since most inscribed objects are found on the art market. To illustrate this issue, we would like to briefly analyse the inscription K. 1215, dating from the 7th–8th century, which is composed of three lines in Pre-Angkorian Khmer. Previous discussions of this text by Saveros Pou (2001, 184; see also Tranet 2000)⁸ and Vong Sotheara (2001, 54–56, 67; 2003, 45–46, 190) lacked access to high-quality documents that resulted in interpretations of an incomplete text, in particular Saveros Pou, who considered the text a mere 'inscription fragment'. Our investigation shows that it is actually complete. The new rendition of K. 1215 is as follows:

(1) *tmo* 'amnoy· śatagrāmāddhyakṣa⁹ ta vrah ka(2)mrātān· 'añ· śrī cakratīrtha¹⁰ ge ta (3) sak gi¹¹ lān¹² vrah ge dau niraya¹³

A detailed analysis of this text is beyond the scope of this chapter. Although short, this inscription raises several questions that merit thorough interpretation both with regard to the administration of ancient Cambodia (*cf.* n. 30) and with regard to the identity of the beneficiary (*cf.* n. 31). However, it is necessary here to evaluate the translation of Saveros Pou, who interpreted the inscription as follows: 'Offering oxen from Śatṅkramādiyakṣa to V.K.A. Śrī Vakratīrma. People who steal these cows of the god, these will go to hell'. She further noted: 'The word *tmo*, which apparently means "stone", must be an error for *tmur*, a generic term for "oxen", because in this brief laconic text, this offering is followed by the sentence *go phoñ vrah*, "the cows of the god"'. Pou's misreading of the imprecation (*go*, 'cow' instead of *gi*: n. 20, 21) explains why she took it as referring to cows as opposed to stones. We argue that knowledge of the medium of the text could have prevented this inaccurate reading.

As a matter of fact, K. 1215 is engraved on the base of a sandstone tray intended to grind spices, aromatic substances, or condiments by means of a roller (Figure 2.3). Cœdès (1920) identified the trays with the Sanskrit *peṣaṇī*, and these objects are often found in excavations of



Figure 2.3 Grinding stone with inscription (K. 1215): a) entire grinding stone; b) detail of K. 1215 text.
Source: (Photos M. Tranet).

Khmer sanctuaries. Cœdès further noted that they are well known in India, both in domestic contexts and in temples, where, in addition to their technical function, they are used in certain ceremonies. A single inscribed example published by Finot (1904) from Campā attests the diffusion within Southeast Asia. These grinding stones were essential for the preparation of meals and offerings of perfumes and fumigations for the god, which, like the ablution, form part of the ‘acts of civility’ (*upacāra*) that punctuate daily worship.

Epigraphy often bears witness to the activity of crushing ointments, as well as of the presence of grinding stones among the goods of the gods. Grinding practices clearly constituted an activity of sufficient importance that female servants were specifically assigned to it, and, to our knowledge, only women were responsible for this task. Indeed, we regularly find reference in the inscriptions to the *pamas jnau* or *pamas gandha*, ‘perfume crushers’, or even *pamas vrah gandha*, ‘holy perfume crushers’ (K. 320N2, l. 9, 10; CE 879; Pou 2001, 60). The term *jnau*, defined as ‘that which has a good flavour or smell: aromatics, condiments’ (Jenner 2009, *s.v.*), is the equivalent of Sanskrit *gandha*, but its use disappeared at the beginning of the Angkor Period in favour of the latter. This phenomenon is probably linked to the transmission of tantric treaties mentioned previously (Soutif 2009, 192). In the inscription K. 832, we can even identify a parallel between the Khmer expression *’nak ta pas gand[ha]*, ‘a person who crushes perfumes’ and the Sanskrit compound *gandhakārī*, ‘a woman making perfumes’ (A, st. X and B, col. c, l. 29; 9–10th; IC V, 91).

In equipment inventories, there are several occurrences of *tmo/thmo*¹⁴ *pi pas*, ‘stone to grind’ (see K. 713B, l. 4, 18, CE 893, IC I, 22–23; K. 774, l. 4, CE 860, IC IV, 64), an object that was clearly dedicated to this use. It should be noted that one of these donations is followed by the mention of 14 pieces of sandalwood (*thmo pi pas 4 candana kaimat* 10 4; K. 262N, l. 16; 968 CE, l. 16; IC IV, 110), a substance that may be referred to by the Sanskrit *gandha*. However, Cœdès pointed out that to crush sandalwood, a stone ‘generally circular, mounted on four feet, is used not as a grinding wheel (since there is no roller), but as a rasp, on which a little sandalwood is

rubbed, the powder thus obtained being used to draw certain sectarian marks on the forehead' (1920, 10). It is therefore possible that *thmo pi pas* designates several types of 'crushing stones'.

Although the 'labels' of the inscribed objects rarely specify their names, it seems that this is the case here, as in K. 1294. Although probably more modest than a silver *kumbha*, this '[grinding] stone' nonetheless belonged to the religious equipment of a sanctuary. It is therefore necessary to re-translate K. 1215 as follows:

Stone; gift of the *adhyakṣa* from Śatagrāma to V.K.'A. (of) Śrī Cakraūrtha¹⁵. People who steal it will offend the divinity; these people will go to hell.

The Sanskrit compound *adhyakṣa* designates a superintendent, an overseer, an inspector, a ruler, but we know too little about its role and the nature of *Śatagrāma*, 'a hundred villages', to impose a translation for the moment. *Śatagrāma* appears in several inscriptions. It is sometimes a toponym associated with terms designating administrative divisions, a *pramān*, 'province' (?) in K. 989B (l. 8; 1009 CE; *IC* VII, 164) and a *sruk*, 'city, village' in K. 235C (l. 59; 1052 CE; Cœdès and Dupont 1943, 87), but the hypothesis that this term sometimes refers more generally to an administrative division comprising 100 villages cannot be ruled out.

When the Disappearance of a Text Generates a Scholarly Text

The third case study, inscription K. 1335, is not engraved on a portable 'object' but on one of the most common epigraphic mediums of Pre-Angkorian and Angkorian times: a temple tower, or *prasat*. This inscription was discovered at Preah Khan of Kompong Svay by Christophe Pottier in January 2000 on the door jambs of the eastern door of building τ, the easternmost of the four laterite buildings located in the northeastern corner of the second enclosure (Figure 2.4).

The northern door jamb is composed of 24 lines, probably in ancient Khmer, while the southern was engraved with 40 lines, probably in Sanskrit¹⁶. The uncertainty of the latter is due to the fact that the whole text has been deliberately destroyed and that the few spared letters—particularly in the lower part of the southern doorjamb—do not permit the decipherment of the text (Figure 2.5). On the other hand, they are sufficient to affirm that it is indeed an Angkorian inscription. Moreover, although paleographic dating is tentative, their similarity to the characters of the inscription K. 161 of the 'Monument of the Inscription' located nearby would seem to date these texts to the first half of the 11th century. This inscription praises Sūryavarman I and recalls the date of his coronation in 1002. It is engraved on the doorjamb of the *cella* of a temple located in the third enclosure of the Preah Khan of Kompong Svay (Mauger 1939; *cf. infra*).

The very fact that this inscription was destroyed is particularly interesting. Indeed, the Khmer epigraphic corpus has provided few examples of the purposeful defacement of texts. Cœdès reported only about ten in his inventory (*IC* VIII), to which must be added some recent discoveries. It often proves difficult to specify the reasons for the destruction of a text. However, apart from a few cases of deletion of a divinity's name, most instances of the destructive erasure of a text constituted an act of *damnatio memoriae*.¹⁷ While the practice of erasure seems to be characteristic of Bayon period foundations, including the Bayon (K. 293.28B) and Banteay Thom (K. 1039), there are no clues to determine why the theonyms were removed (*cf. Cœdès* 1951). It is however interesting to mention here Christophe Pottier's discovery that the lower part of the text from K. 774 was completely erased. Initially studied by Cœdès (*IC* 4, 64), he noted that, 'in 911ç. (989 CE), the rights of the temple seem to have been challenged, but the inscription stops there; perhaps it is unfinished'. It can be postulated that in this case



Figure 2.4 Prasat towers σ , ρ , π , and τ in Preah Khan of Kompong Svay. View from the northeast.

Source: (Photo D. Soutif).

the inscription is not ‘unfinished’ but that the contestation of the rights of the temple was the reason for erasing the lower part of this inscription (Pottier 2000, 23). Once again, it appears necessary for the epigraphist to study the medium before translating the text. Another famous example of this practice are the lists of dignitaries subordinate to Sūryavarman I in which several crossed-out names and passages clearly condemned to oblivion officials who failed to faithfully respect their oath (*cf.* K. 292; 1011 CE; *IC* III, 205).

In light of our proposed palaeographic dating of K. 1335, we argue that the destruction of this text might relate to the conflict between two contenders for the throne of Angkor, Jayavīravarman and Sūryavarman I, sometime at the beginning of the 11th century. Perhaps the effaced texts were commissioned by the loser (Jayavīravarman), or one of his allies who pledged allegiance to him. Scratching out the text literally made him disappear, effectively expunging him from ‘history’. According to Vickery, K. 834 also presents the genealogy of a dignitary with erased parts that he explains as follows: ‘It is thus possible that the erasures of this inscription were designed to efface the family’s previous service at his [Jayavīravarman] court’ (1985, 234).

While Sūryavarman I’s origins remain difficult to establish with certainty (see Vickery 1985), it is generally believed that he came from eastern Cambodia, where the oldest epigraphic evidence of his reign has been found. If our palaeographic dating is validated, and if the destruction of the inscription was indeed intended to erase the memory of a competitor, then the hypothesis concerning the origin of Sūryavarman I demands revision. Alternatively, this textual

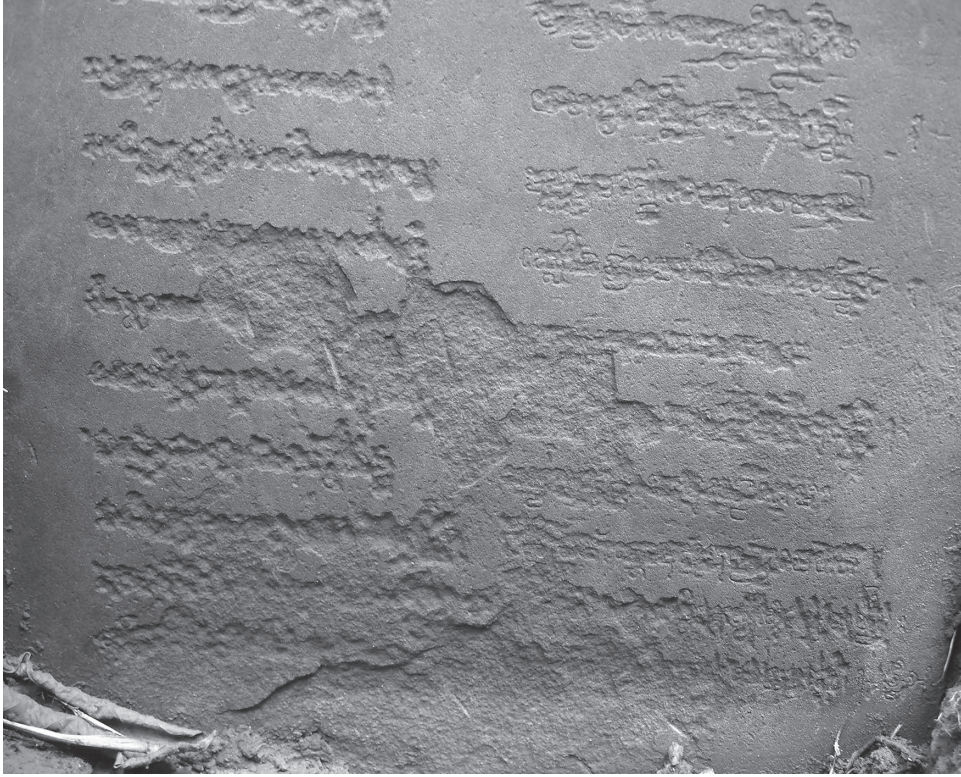


Figure 2.5 K. 1335, detail of the lower part of the southern door jamb.

Source: (Photo D. Soutif).

evidence leads us to assume that Jayavīravarman, or one of his subordinates, dominated the Preah Khan of Kompong Svay area.

Beyond historical considerations, the dating we propose raises questions about architectural history and the evolution of construction techniques. Indeed, the dating of the inscribed door jambs theoretically provides a *terminus ante quem* for the monument. However, the four laterite towers resemble the architecture of Prasat Suor Prat and, according to Mauger, one of its lintels corresponds to a period falling between the Angkor Wat and Bayon styles (1939, 207). Thus, this evidence would date these buildings to the second half of the 12th century.¹⁸ In the same vein, the assembly of the laterite corbelled vault blocks is characterised by the use of vertical ‘bayonet-cut’ joints (Figure 2.6), a technique that Boisselier has demonstrated first dates to the Bayon period (1966, 129). Although the date of appearance of this technique requires further analysis, it seems difficult to trace it back to the beginning of the 11th century, when stone vaults, even without bayonet joints, were not very widespread.

At this stage, the architectural evidence would support a later date and casts doubt on the early 11th-century erasure of the text we initially proposed for K. 1335. However, the presence of bayonet joints is not sufficient reason to definitively rule out our hypothesis. Indeed, it would seem significant that the same type of joints can be found in the ‘Monument of the Inscription’ where the inscription K. 161, engraved on the southern doorjamb of the door of the *cella*, has



Figure 2.6 Detail of vertical ‘bayonet-cut’ joints in the corbelled vault from prasat tower ρ in Preah Khan of Kompong Svay.

Source: (Photo D. Soutif).

been confidently attributed to the reign of Sūryavarman I.¹⁹ However, it seems unlikely that this type of joint was used widely at this early date. Although it is possible the doorjamb of K. 161 was moved from an older temple to the ‘Monument of the Inscription’, this seems highly doubtful for the two door jambs bearing destroyed inscriptions.

Indeed, we are more inclined to date these sanctuaries to the end of the 12th century. However, if we wish to better understand the first Angkorian installation at Preah Khan Kompong Svay, these deliberately erased inscriptions will require more attention to date both the four laterite towers of the second enclosure and the monument of the inscription.

Conclusion

The corpus of Khmer inscriptions is essentially a ‘billboard literature’ that delivers only an official version of historical reality, but it is nevertheless a rich body of historical testimony that remains largely untapped. It has been widely translated and interpreted in the past, starting with the works of Auguste Barth, Abel Bergaigne, George Cœdès, Kamaleswar Bhattacharya, Saveros Pou, Claude Jacques, and Michael Vickery. However, over the past 20 years, numerous publications have shown that much of the information has remained insufficiently analysed or at least

List of Inscriptions in the Text

K.	Reference	K.	Reference
56	IC VII: 3	713	IC I: 18
103	IC V: 33	774	IC IV: 64
134	Cœdès 1905: 419; IC II: 92	806	IC I: 73
161	Finot 1904: 672	826	IC I: 31
227	Lowman 2012	832	IC V: 91
235	Cœdès and Dupont 1943: 56	834	IC V: 244
262	IC IV: 108	989	IC VII: 164
273	Cœdès 1906: 44	1039	Soutif and Estève [to be published]
292	IC III: 205	1215	Vong 2001; NIC II-III: 184
293	Cœdès 1928: 106	1236	Goodall 2015
320	NIC II-III: 55	1262	Soutif [to be published]
447	IC II: 193	1263	Soutif [to be published]
528	Finot 1925: 309	1264	Goodall [to be published]
619	Finot 1928: 51	1320	Goodall and Jacques 2014
669	IC I: 159	1417	Goodall et al. [to be published]

IC = Inscriptions du Cambodge; Cœdès 1937–66.

NIC = Nouvelles inscriptions du Cambodge; tome I: Pou 1989; tome II-III: Pou 2001.

deserves specialised perspectives such as economic or ritual approaches. The corpus has been examined to explore a diverse range of topics, including religious studies; literature and philosophy (e.g., Bourdonneau, Estève, Gerschheimer, Goodall, Griffiths, Sanderson); astronomy (Billard, Eade, Golzio); ritual practices and mathematics (Soutif); linguistics, especially Khmer linguistics (Jenner, Long Seam, Pou); and economics (Lustig). The inscriptions presented here show new examples of how the combination of archaeological and epigraphic data can generate novel insights and knowledge of the material culture of ancient Cambodia.

Notes

- 1 This inscribed vase was reported in 2012 by Vittorio Roveda to Christophe Pottier while it was for sale at an antique shop in Bangkok. In February 2016, it was donated by its purchaser, François Mandeville, to the National Museum of Cambodia in Phnom Penh, where it has been accessioned under the number NMC.276.
- 2 Text based on photos provided to the *Corpus des Inscriptions khmères* research program by Christophe Pottier, Dominique Soutif, Julia Estève, and Bertrand Porte.
- 3 *Kṣatadoṣapakṣaḥ*: punning second interpretation, to be understood in parallel with the primary, or contextually best-fitting meaning: ‘who was a veritable sun/moon in as much as he was one by whom the enemies (*pakṣa*) that are the nights (*doṣa*) are destroyed’ (Dominic Goodall).
- 4 Although this part of the vase is very scratched, the reading seems certain. Nor have we found an equivalent occurrence such as *khcāp* in the Angkorian corpus.
- 5 We would like to thank Dominic Goodall for drawing our attention to this point and, in general, for the many tips and information he provided us during the preparation of this chapter.
- 6 This inscription was studied in January 2019 during the Tenth International Intensive Reading Retreat organised at the EFEO Center in Siem Reap by Dominic Goodall (EFEO) and Csaba Dezső (Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest).
- 7 It seems unlikely to us that it is the same city as the one mentioned in the Khmer inscriptions.
- 8 Michel Tranet first reported this inscription and gave it the number Ka 24 in his inventory. He provided photographs to the CORPUS DES INSCRIPTIONS KHMÈRES research program. Our edition is based on these documents, and we would like to thank him for allowing us to reproduce them (Figure 2.3).

The inscription was reportedly discovered on a mound with brick remains called Tuol Ku Kam, located about 500 m south-southeast of Wat Komnour, in the municipality of Praek Phtol (Angkor Borei district, Takeo province). It was given to the Royal Palace of Phnom Penh in 2005.

- 9 S. Pou: śatṛ°; Vong Sotheara, S. Pou: °grāmāddhyakṣa: °kramādyakṣa.
- 10 Vong Sotheara, S. Pou: vakra°; S. Pou: °fīmra.
- 11 S. Pou: go.
- 12 S. Pou: phoñ.
- 13 S. Pou: nairaya.
- 14 Tmo is the Pre-Angkorian form of thmo.
- 15 This is obviously once again a Pre-Angkorian toponym/theonym association, as in the case of Kāmarāṅga. Associated with a place called Cakratīrtha, ('the holy place of the Disc'), it can be assumed that it was a Vaiṣṇava deity.
- 16 We base this assumption on the fact that the text of the Northern door jamb is arranged in columns. Although we can find some texts in ancient Khmer arranged in columns, they remain relatively rare, and this arrangement is more common for texts versified in Sanskrit, the space between the columns corresponding to the caesura in the verses.
- 17 It should be recalled that in ancient Rome, this expression, which can be translated into the 'damnation of memory', consists of a post-mortem sentence to oblivion, which is manifested, *inter alia*, by the erasure of the name of the person in question.
- 18 These sanctuaries, which face the royal terraces in Angkor Thom, have never been precisely dated, but are generally attributed to the Bayon period, or at least to the second half of the 12th century.
- 19 We would like to thank Christophe Pottier, who drew our attention to this discrepancy and shared with us his many observations about this technique, starting with its use both in the tower and in the 'monument of the inscription'.

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