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From Ashoka to Jayavarman VII: Some Reflections
on the Relationship between Buddhism and
the State in India and Southeast Asia

by
Hermann Kulke



INDIA INTERNATIONAL CENTRE
40, MAX MUELLER MARG, NEW DELHI-110 003
TEL. : 24619431 FAX: 24627751

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From Ashoka to Jayavarman VII: Some Reflections on the Relationship between Buddhism and the State in India and Southeast Asia*

Ashoka and Jayavarman VII, two of India's and Southeast Asia's greatest rulers, were undoubtedly Buddhists. Ashoka produced the earliest and largest number of inscriptions of early India, all of them with a clear Buddhist connotation. And Jayavarman left to us, most likely, not only Southeast Asia's largest number of royal inscriptions, but also produced the largest number of monuments in Angkor, all of them being of a Buddhist nature, as are his inscriptions. But Ashoka and Jayavarman were not only rulers of India's and Southeast Asia's most impressive early medieval states which may rightly be termed as empires.

Under both of them, their states even reached their climax. However, the puzzling problem is that their rule was followed soon after their deaths by an inexorable decay of their erstwhile great empires. And what matters in this context, this decay was linked to a reaction against the Buddhism propagated by these great Buddhist rulers.

The Buddhist tradition of a Brahmanical counteraction against Buddhism under the Sungas has been refuted with good cause since long. After all, the marvellously carved railings of the Buddhist stupa of Bharhut belong to the age of the Sungas. But none of Ashoka's weak successors on the Maurya throne is

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known to have followed his *dhamma* policy, and Pushyamitra Sunga, who killed the last Maurya ruler in 187 BC, is known to have conducted two horse sacrifices, an act detrimental to Ashoka's *dhamma* (Thapar, 2002: 210; Singh, 2008: 366). Jayavarman's reign, however, was definitely 'followed by a violent reaction accompanied by acts of vandalism' (Briggs, 1951: 239). Buddhist temples founded by Jayavarman were converted to Shaivism which seems to have been reintroduced as a state cult. Hundreds of small Buddhist images were systematically destroyed in Preah Khan and Ta Prohm. In 1933, the broken pieces of the Bayon's principal image, a 3.6 m Buddha, were discovered at the bottom of its central well (Jacques and Freeman, 2003: 83). The crucial question is whether the causes of the posthumous fate of Ashoka's and Jayavarman's great achievements have to be traced in the biography of these rulers or whether it represents also an inherent ambivalent nature of the relationship between Buddhism and the state in India and pre-Theravada Buddhist Southeast Asia.

Ashoka's *dhamma* Policy and *dhamma* Politics

If one looks at the Maurya state under Ashoka and its relationship with Buddhism, one is confronted with the two seemingly contradictory corpora of sources, particularly the *Arthashastra* and the inscriptions of Ashoka. The *Arthashastra* is a political textbook for a powerful, highly centralised state, without even the slightest indication of Buddhism, whereas Ashoka's inscriptions are inspired by and imbued with his Buddhist missionary fervour. The situation is further complicated by the uncertainty of authorship and date of the *Arthashastra*, especially since Trautmann (1971) and others distinguish clearly between distinct layers, several of which have to be dated in the early centuries AD. The other two strongly differing genres of sources are the 'classical' Greek accounts, especially Megasthenes, and the legendary accounts of later centuries about Ashoka's great Buddhist deeds as transmitted, particularly in Sri Lanka's Pali chronicles and the *Asokavadana*. They, too, strengthen the bipartite depiction of a powerful, centralised Mauryan empire on the one hand, and of Ashoka as an idealised exemplary Buddhist king on the other. This ambivalence of the available sources

complicates the attempt to define the nature of the Mauryan state under Ashoka. In the following, references will be made primarily to Ashoka's inscriptions, the only definitely contemporary sources of his statecraft.

The Mauryan state is the outcome and culmination of a continuous process of state formation in the extended Gangetic plain, a process which Romila Thapar once designated 'from lineage to state' (Thapar, 1984). It passed through several distinct phases of development from Vedic chiefdoms and *janapadas* to post-Vedic early kingdoms of the *maha-janapadas*, and their fierce struggle for supremacy, which led to the rise of Magadha and finally to the foundation of India's first trans-regional state under the Nandas. Little or in fact next to nothing is known about its actual structure and administration. But it is very likely that it was not very different from what we know about the much better documented Maurya state under its founder Chandragupta. But there was at least one essential difference. The Nanda state consisted of formerly independent *maha-janapada* states. As they had already successfully passed through the early stages of state formation, they were endowed at least with a rudimentary administration, and in most cases with fairly well-developed urban centres and networks of trans-regional trade. But Chandragupta and his son and successor Bimbisara, extended their realm far beyond into pre-state societies in Central India and parts of far-off south India, a development of aggressive expansionism which reached its zenith with Ashoka's conquest of Kalinga. This step-wise rise of Magadha from a *maha-janapada* to the metropolitan core area of India's first empire under the Mauryas, was based on a succession of sanguinary wars and what we now would call naked power politics. The permeation of their authority through vast, hitherto unconquered and mostly tribal areas, required a new validation of dominion beyond clan-oriented power politics of post-Vedic state formation.

As is well known, the conquest of Kalinga in 261 BC led to a crucial change in Ashoka's life which had a very direct impact on the nature of the Maurya state and the development of Buddhism. His famous 13th edict of his rock inscriptions contains the very personal confession:

When king Devanampriya [or 'Beloved of the God'] had been anointed eight years (the country of) the Kalingas was conquered by him. One hundred and fifty thousand in number were the men who were deported thence, one hundred thousand in number were those who were slain there, and many times as many those who died. After that, now that (the country of) the Kalingas has been taken, Devanampriya (is devoted) to a zealous study of morality (*dhamma*), to the love of morality, and to the instruction (of people) in morality. This is the repentance of Devanampriya on account of his conquest of (the country of) the Kalingas. [...] Even the hundredth part or the thousandth part of all those people who were slain, who died, and who were deported at that time in Kalinga, (would) now be considered very deplorable by Devanampriya. [...] And this conquest is [now] considered the greatest one, viz. the conquest by Dhamma (*dhamma-vijaya*) (Hultzsch, 1925:13th Rock Edict (RE), Shahbazgarhi version, 68-69).

A few years later, in 258 BC, Ashoka admitted in his minor rock inscriptions that 'initially I was not very zealous. But for a little more than a year, I have drawn close to the *sangha* and have been very zealous' and become an *upasaka* or lay worshipper of Buddha (ibid., 1st RE, Rupnath version:167).

During this year, he went on a 256-day pilgrimage (*dhamma-yata*) and began his large-scale missionary activities. In numerous rock edicts strategically placed in all parts of his empire (Falk, 2006), he published the *dhamma* principles of right conduct, and he sent to all countries known to him ambassadors to spread his *dhamma* message abroad. He instructed governors and district officers to have inscribed the principles of his *dhamma* message on rocks and pillars wherever possible, thereby producing a series of smaller rock edicts in which Ashoka openly confessed his Buddhist faith. In the following year, in 257 BC, he had the first four of his altogether 14 major rock edicts cut into rocks at eight places in frontier regions. In these edicts, Ashoka ordered all citizens of his empire to desist as far as possible from eating meat and he also prohibited illicit and unwanted meetings.¹

He indicated his goodwill to all neighbours of his empire: to the Cholas, Pandyas, Satyaputras and Keralaputras in south India and to Tambapani (Sri Lanka).

In the same year, he also undertook a unique act in the ancient world: he sent missionary ambassadors (*duta*) to distant countries and kings of the Hellenistic world. These were the king of the Greeks (Yona), Antiyoka (Antiyochos II of Syria, 261-246 BC), Tulumay (Ptolomaios II, Philadelphos 285-247 BC), Antekina (Antigonos Gonates of Macedonia, 276-239 BC), Maka (Magas of Cyrene, ca. 300-250 BC), and Alikasudala (probably Alexander of Epirus, 272-255 BC) (Thapar, 1973: 40-41). But more important for the future spread of 'Buddhism across Asia' than his mission to these Mediterranean countries was his 'conquest by Dharma' (*dhamma vijaya*) of northwest India and Afghanistan, and in south India as far as Karnataka and Sri Lanka. From Gandhara, Buddhism penetrated into Central Asia from where it reached China via the Silk Road in the first century AD and from south India and Sri Lanka it spread to Southeast Asia.² From the beginning, Ashoka's endeavour to propagate and get his *dhamma* policy carried out does not seem to have been met with unrestricted approval. He indirectly admitted this when, in a new series of rock edicts in the 13th year after his coronation, he stated: 'It is difficult to perform virtuous deeds. He who starts performing virtuous deeds accomplishes something difficult (Hultzsch, 5th RE, Kalsi version: 33).' In order to break the resistance and to intensify the teaching of right conduct, he appointed high officers called *Dhamma-Mahamattas*. They had to teach right conduct and supervise the people in its performance. They had to report to Ashoka personally, who emphasised that they would have access to him at all times even if he was having his meals or residing in his private rooms. These officers were, as stated in the 5th major rock edict, 'deployed everywhere here [in Pataliputra] and in all the outlying towns, in the harems of our brothers, sisters and whatever other relatives' (ibid.).

The indisputable merits of Ashoka's '*dhamma* policy' after having joined the Buddhist community as an *upasaka* layman are too well known to be elaborated in detail (Gombrich, 1988: 127-36). Suffice it to mention just a few of them. Most revolutionary was certainly his quest for pacifism and *ahimsa* or non-

violence. After his conquest of Kalinga, he abstained for nearly 30 years, until his death, from any further military conquests and restricted the slaughter of animals for consumption as far as possible. In several inscriptions, he propagated a kind of social welfare when he announced, 'I consider it my duty (to promote) the welfare of all men' (ibid., 6th RE, Girnar Version:13). He demanded 'courtesy to slaves and servants' (ibid., 11th RE, Girnar version:19) and had dug wells and planted trees along the roads for the sake of men and animals.

Ashoka did not neglect his duties as a ruler. In spite of his contrition after the conquest of Kalinga, he never thought of relinquishing his hold over this country or sending back the people deported from there. But while pursuing his missionary activities, Ashoka did not neglect his duties as a ruler. In spite of his contrition after the conquest of Kalinga, he never thought of relinquishing his hold over this country or sending back the people deported from there. And as an astute politician, he also refrained from proclaiming his remorse in the rock edicts he put up at two places in Kalinga itself. Instead of the just quoted text of the famous 13th rock edict of the other six places, we find in Kalinga's two separate edicts at Dhauli and Jaugada Ashoka's perhaps most famous statement: 'All men are my children. As on behalf of (my own) children I desire that they may be provided by me with complete welfare and happiness in this world and the other world, even so is my desire on behalf of all men' (ibid., 2nd separate RE, Jaugada version:117). However, outside Kalinga, Ashoka

announces in the 13th edict just after the above quoted remorse for the sufferings caused by his conquest of Kalinga a quite different policy towards the forest people: 'Even (the inhabitants of) the forests which are (included) in the dominions of Devanampriya, even those he pacifies and converts. And they are told of the power (to punish them) which Devanampriya (possesses) in spite of (his) repentance, in order that they may be ashamed (of their crimes) and not be killed' (ibid., 13th RE, Shahbazgarhi version: 69).

Ashoka seems to have regarded the forest tribes (*apavi*) of the frontier zones as dangerous enemies of his empire (Thapar, 1961: 203). It is therefore not surprising that the two separate edicts of Kalinga, which till today are famous for its tribal population, proclaim in great detail to its provincial officers Ashoka's instructions

on how to 'pacify and convert' the forest people. The officers had to read out Ashoka's orders regularly, 'even to a single person', and they were visited by *Dhamma Mahamatras* officers who 'shall see that they carry out my instructions'.

The strict orders to his provincial officers in Kalinga were not an isolated case. Ashoka's inscriptions are full of often very detailed instructions to officials, and increasingly also to the Buddhist Sangha, and are one of the most fascinating aspects of his inscriptions. After having sworn off the Kshatriya ideal of martial *digvijayas* of Brahmin traditions and having become instead a devoted follower of Buddha's *ahimsa* dharma, Ashoka seems to have turned out also as a passionate bureaucrat, giving detailed orders and controlling their execution. The most visible manifestation of this distinctive feature is, of course, his edicts. The repeated new drafting, distribution and chiselling of at least three separate kinds of edicts at nearly 60 selected places (Falk, 2006) in his vast empire, some of them several thousand kilometres apart, required, as Gerald Fussman and others have shown, a meticulous administration (Fussman, 1987/88). In all likelihood, it was under Ashoka's direct control, even though not always to his full satisfaction, as he admitted himself. His instructions are not only sometimes quite rigid, but they are usually also characterised by excessively moralising preaching.

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Ashoka did not leave it at giving instructions, but demanded reports about the execution of his orders. For instance, in the 6th rock edict of Girnar we are informed:

King Devanampriya Priyadarsin speaks thus. In times past neither the disposal of affairs nor the submission of reports at any time did exist. But I have made the following (arrangement). Reporters (*pativedaka*) are posted everywhere, (with instructions) to report to me the affairs of the people at any time, while I am eating, in the harem, in the inner apartment, even at the cowpen, in the palanquin, and in the parks. And everywhere I am disposing [of] the affairs of the people. And if in the council (of *Mahamatras*) a dispute arises, or an amendment is moved, in connection with any

donation or proclamation which I myself am ordering verbally, or (in connection with) an emergent matter which has been delegated to the *Mahamatras*, it must be reported to me immediately, anywhere and at any time (Hultzsch: 6th RE, Girnar version, 12-13).

Particularly revealing in this edict is Ashoka's statement that previously the information system of secret informants or spies did not work properly. This is astonishing as Megasthenes reported in the age of Chandragupta, Ashoka's grandfather, about a special estate or caste of informants and spies³ and as the *Arthashastra*, too, contains detailed instructions to them. But obviously their efficiency did not meet Ashoka's expectations. Although we don't know whether he established an additional new institution with these *pativedaka* 'reporters', his edicts clearly show that strengthening the centrally controlled informant system was a major aim of his policy. Basham therefore was certainly right when he concluded that 'Ashoka's reforms tended to centralization rather than devolution' (Basham, 1959: 55).

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What matters for us is that Ashoka also seems to have instrumentalised the propagation of his *dharmma* message and the control of its implementation as an additional means to strengthen his political control over his vast empire. The convergence of his political intentions and his *dharmma* policy might have been even stronger than hitherto assumed if *Dharmma Mahamatras* were also recruited from among the Buddhist Sangha, as recently proposed by Tilman Frasch (personal communication).

In this context, we may also have to consider that Ashoka used his position as a royal *upasaka* or layman to interfere in questions of Buddhist teachings and Sangha organisation. In the so-called 'schism edict' of Sanchi, he expressed his desire that the Sangha 'may be united as long as the moon and sun shine' and orders that 'monk[s] and nun[s] who shall break up the Sangha' must be expelled from the Sangha (Hultzsch: Samchi Pillar, 160-61). His Bairat rock

inscription, now at the Asiatic Society in Kolkata, contains Ashoka's clearest confession of his Buddhist faith. He introduces himself to the Sangha as 'Priyadarshin, Raja in Magadha', with the words, 'it is known to you, Sirs, how great is my reference and faith in the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha'. But then he announces that 'I feel bound to declare', and lists seven canonical Buddhist texts which have to be read out and to which 'many groups of monks and nuns' [...] as well as laymen and laywomen 'may repeatedly listen'. The inscription ends with the significant words: 'Sirs, I am causing this to be written, in order that they [the Sangha] may know my intention' (ibid.: Bairat Rock Inscription, 173-74). Ashoka's instructions in religious matters, expressed with due respect to the religious authorities, clearly reveal his intention to strengthen the unity of the Sangha and its Buddhist teaching as an essential basis of political authority.

In view of his seemingly very successful *dhamma* policy, one has to ask why his hope did not come true, that 'the sons, grandsons and great-grandsons of King Devanampriya will promote this practice of *dhamma* until the destruction of the world... For this is the best work, viz. instruction in *dhamma*' (ibid., 4th RE, Girnar version: 8). Obviously wishful thinking which he expressed several times in his edicts. The easiest way to clarify this question is to blame Ashoka's pacifism for the decline of the late Mauryan state which allegedly made it easy prey for foreign invaders of the northwest in the early 2nd century BC. This seemingly plausible explanation is often found in nationalist historical writing.

But to my mind, its downfall was caused primarily by inherent problems of early state formation in India and by Ashoka's attempt to solve them through his *dhamma* policy. The extension of the predominantly north Indian Nanda state to an imperial pan-Indian empire under the three Mauryan rulers from Chandragupta to Ashoka, extending even beyond the Hindukush, required a new kind of universal validation and legitimacy. After the sanguinary conquest of Kalinga, Ashoka obviously realised the ideological deficiency of the inherited traditional Brahmanic political teaching for ruling a vast sub-continental empire. In this situation, he may have perceived Buddhism not only as an alternative personal

faith. He must have been aware also of the great organisational capacity of the widespread Sangha and its strong urban base as an additional and efficient medium for propagating his new *dhamma* policy, which provided 'networks of loyalty which would be supportive of political needs' (Thapar, 1987: 24). In view of his personal Buddhist confession, it was self-evident that he chose the universal, trans-local and trans-cultural ethics of Buddhism also as his new 'state ideology'.

However, in view of the still prevalent dominant Brahmanical traditions, the question remains as to what extent, or whether at all, Buddhism has been able to provide a coherent ideology for an empire like the Mauryan state. After all, Buddhism had its origin in a religious movement with an inherent 'notion of dissent'. According to Thapar, it was 'seeking to establish a parallel society', although its articulation was often ambiguous. But she also points out that 'one of the paradoxes of the Indian tradition is that the renouncer is a symbol of authority within the society' (Thapar, 2002: 876). To my estimation, it was exactly this paradox which characterises the ambiguity of Ashoka's *dhamma* policy as a competing ideology with *Rajadharma*, the Brahmanic Kshatriya ideology. Based on Ashoka's personal belief system and his authority as a 'royal renouncer' with

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the charisma of an 'exemplary king', it seems to have operated successfully without any open opposition throughout his lifetime. The cause of its fading away after his death was not an alleged Brahmanical reaction. It was the ambiguity of Ashoka's policy to centralise the state politically and strengthen his authority by his ethic *dhamma* policy. His quest for universal change of mankind seems to have assumed proportions of an ideological overstretch. During his later years, 'his reign became increasingly obsessed with *dhamma*' as pointed out by Romila Thapar and other historians (Thapar, 1966: 88; Singh, 2008: 354).

But as an ideal Buddhist king, Ashoka's fame remained alive in India for more than a millennium and until today in Sri Lanka and in the Buddhist countries of Southeast and East Asia to which his fame spread since the early centuries AD. However, the future

development and processes of state formation in India were again dominated by Brahmanical concepts of the state, validating regional statehood rather than pan-Indian empires.

Jayavarman's Buddhist Self-aggrandisement

Jayavarman VII of Angkor embodies the apotheosis of Mahayana Buddhism as a state ideology of Angkor. As it was as strongly influenced by, or even based on, the inherited Hindu Devaraja cult, as Ashoka's *dhamma* policy by Brahmanic *Arthashastra* ideology, a short review of the Devaraja cult is expedient. After a series of successful wars, the future empire of Angkor was founded in 802 by Jayavarman II with the grand ritual consecration of a *Sivalingam* with the name Devaraja on Mahendraparvata, the Phnom Kulen, about 60 km northeast of Angkor. The Devaraja, the tutelary deity of Angkor, is supposed to have been re-established ritually again and again on top of the newly constructed royal temple pyramids of Angkor until the late 11th century. The names of the *lingam* on top of the temple-mountains combined the names of the ruling kings and founders of these temples with *īśvara* 'the Supreme Lord' or 'god', an epithet or name of Siva. Thus, for instance, the *lingam* on the Bakheng, built by Yasodhavarman in the late 9th century as the first central temple pyramid in Angkor proper, bears the name Yasodheśvara.

The Devaraja cult has caused much ink to flow, primarily because, according to the rules of Sanskrit grammar, *devarāja* allows two very different interpretations, 'the king who is the god' and 'the king of gods'. It was particularly G. Coedès, the doyen of Angkor historians, who fought vehemently for more than half a century for the first interpretation and thus for the deification of the Angkor kings (Coedès, 1952a). But research since the late sixtieth of the last century confirmed instead the second interpretation, that the Devaraja cult was a cult of Siva as 'King of Gods' and tutelary deity of Angkor (Filliozat, 1966; Mabbett, 1969; Woodward, 2001), most likely worshipped in a bronze image of Siva (Kulke, 1978). The Devaraja was therefore not identical with the central *lingam* on top of the temple-mountains. Yasodheśvara, the *lingam* and central deity of the Bakeng

has instead to be understood as 'Lord [Siva] of Yasodhavarman'. Only after his death did Yasodhavarman enter the world (*loka*) of Siva and was posthumously deified by his name Paramasivaloka.

But the Brahmanic state ideology of Angkor passed through several stages of development which gradually brought the ruling kings closer to divinity. Suffice it to highlight its culmination under Udayadityavarman II (1050-1066). In the famous Lovek inscription we find clear epigraphic evidence about the cosmographical significance of his new Baphuon temple and the function of its royal *lingam* in the state cult of Angkor (Majumdar, 1953: 424). We learn from it that Udayadityavarman erected the *suvarnadri* or 'golden mountain' (the Baphuon) in his own city, vying with the abode of the gods, the golden Mount Meru, standing in the middle of Jambudvīpa. On the summit of this golden mountain, he consecrated the *suvarnalinga* in a temple resplendent with divine radiance. A victorious general sought permission to donate his spoils of war to the golden *lingam* of the golden mountain, which harboured in itself the 'subtle inner self' (*sukṣma-antara-ātman*) of Udayadityavarman (ibid., Prah Nok Stele Inscription, verse 159: 398). Here, in a few lines, we find the very essence of the apotheosis of the ruler in 11th century Angkor.

The 'subtle inner self' of the king dwells in a *lingam* which the king has consecrated in the course of his reign on a temple-mountain as a symbol of fecundity and strength. As the kings of Angkor are also exalted as a portion (*amsa*) of Siva, it appears that this 'portion' and the 'subtle inner self' of the king are one and the same. Hence the god Siva and the king of Angkor were united in a *lingam* upon the top-most step of a temple pyramid which constituted the ritual centre of the Angkorian kingdom and represented the microcosmic replica of Mount Meru, the abode of the gods. But despite this ritual unification of the ruling kings of Angkor with Siva, during their lifetime they were neither a god nor even Siva himself. The Khmer portions of the inscriptions distinguish clearly between *kamraten jagat ta rāja*, the 'Lord of the World [who is] the King', the equivalent of Siva as *devarāja*, and *kamraten phdai karom*, the 'Lord of the Earth', the ruling king of Angkor (Kulke, 1978: 23). Only after their death did

they enter Siva's divine place (*pada*) or world (*loka*), as known from their posthumous names.

In order to estimate Jayavarman's new and revolutionary quest for divine Buddhahood already during his lifetime, it is necessary to have also a brief look at the decline of the Devaraja cult in the 11th and 12th centuries. Suryavarman I, the first truly imperial king of Angkor in the first half of the 11th century, was a Buddhist, as known from his posthumous name Nirvanapada. The recovery and just mentioned culmination of the Devaraja state cult under his successor Udayadityavarman was in fact its 'swan song'. After his Baphuon, no further royal temple mountains were erected for royal *lingas* at Angkor. Angkor's next imperial king, Suryavarman II, instead dedicated Angkor Wat, the world's greatest sacred monument, to the Hindu god Vishnu and received the posthumous name Paramavisnuloka. Suryavarman was succeeded in c.1150 by his cousin Dharanindravarman II who, too, was an ardent Buddhist. His son was the great Jayavarman VII. In view of this decline of the Shaivite state cult of Angkor, Jayavarman VII could rightly proclaim allegorically in one of his inscriptions that the mountain of Siva in the Himayala, and thus also his temple mountain(s) in Angkor, was uprooted (*unmûlita*) (Coedès 1952b: 212).

Due to internal revolts and the rule of two usurpers, Jayavarman was unable to ascend the throne immediately after the death of his father. He had to wait until the disastrous raid on Angkor in 1177 by an army of Champa, during which the usurper was killed and Angkor devastated. But it took four years until Jayavarman was crowned after the final defeat of Champa. During his eventful and martial rule until c. 1220, Cambodia reached its greatest expansion.

In regard to Buddhist influence on Jayavarman's policy and state ideology, most deserving is doubtless his meritorious construction of 102 hospitals and 123 rest houses for the use of pilgrims established all over the state. In an inscription,

In regard to Buddhist influence on Jayavarman's policy and state ideology, most deserving is doubtless his meritorious construction of 102 hospitals and 123 rest houses for the use of pilgrims established all over the state.

Jayavarman proclaims that 'he suffered from the maladies of his subjects more than from his own; for it is the public grief which makes the grief of kings, not their own grief' (Coedes, 1906: 44-81; Briggs, 1951: 233), a statement which reminds us of Ashoka's *dharmma* ethics. A particularly fascinating aspect of his 'social policy' is the uniform foundation stelae of these hospitals and the amazingly detailed lists of their personnel and provision (Coedes, 1940: 344-47; Finot, 1903: 18-33). The personnel housed in each hospital consisted of altogether 36 persons, beginning with two doctors, assisted by a man and two women, two store-keepers, two cooks, 14 hospital attendants, among others. The detailed lists of food provisions which are provided thrice a year and the quantities of which are always exactly stated, reads like an account of a flourishing grocery. The expenditure for the four large hospitals attached to Angkor exceeded the expenditure for all the hospitals in the countryside. They consumed annually altogether 11,192 tons of rice produced by 838 villages with a population of 81,640 people. They were provided with 2,124 kg of sesame, 105 kg of cardamom, 2,124 nutmegs, etc.

Equally fascinating are the consecration stelae of Jayavarman's two vast temple complexes of Ta Prohm and Preah Khan with their detailed lists of personnel and landed property required for their services. Ta Prohm, dedicated to Jayavarman's mother, owned 3,140 villages with 79,365 people, of whom 18 were great priests, 2,740 officiates, 2,202 assistants and 615 dancers (Coedes, 1906). Preah Khan, with its 430 images and dedicated to his father, owned 5,324 villages with 97,840 peoples.

The most dramatic change of Angkor's ritual policy was caused by Jayavarman's inconceivable building project as a unique manifestation of his Buddhist religion and state ideology. After the final defeat of the Chams, he built his new capital in the vast urban space of Angkor. Angkor Thom, the 'Great Town' of approximately 3x3 km was protected by massive walls of about 6 m height and surrounded by a moat of 100 m width. Its cosmographic iconography combines in a most ingenious and unique way Puranic Hindu mythology with Brahmanic *Śilpaśāstra* town-planning. The truly monumental *Bayon*, which C. Jacques calls 'one of the

most enigmatic and powerful religious constructions of the world' (Jacques and Freeman, 2003: 78), was superimposed right in the centre of Angkor Thom's temple-mountains. It represents the Mahayana Buddhist Mount Meru, consisting of 37 still existing towers, all of them being equipped with the world-famous Buddha faces on the four cardinal points which display a strong resemblance to Jayavarman's portrait sculptures.

But it is not the *Bayon* alone which symbolises in Angkor (and Southeast Asia) a hitherto unknown manifestation of ritual deification of a ruler during his lifetime. During the first decade of his rule, Jayavarman had the two temple complexes constructed outside the walled city, the Ta Prohm in 1186 and the Preah Khan in 1191. They are nearly as impressive as the *Bayon* and were dedicated to his deceased parents. Ta Prohm sheltered the image of the queen mother as Prajnaparamita, and Preah Khan, his father's image as Lokeshvara. These divinities are the most highly venerated Bodhisattvas in Southeast Asian Mahayana Buddhism and form, together with the Buddha, the great trinity of Mahayana Buddhism. G. Coedès asked the interesting question, that if Ta Prohm sheltered the king's mother as Prajnaparamita, and Preah Khan, his father's image, in the guise of Lokeshvara, 'where was the image of Buddha which was normally placed between the two?' And he very convincingly conjectured that:

...very probably this third image was in the *Bayon*, the central temple of the city of Angkor where the [already mentioned] giant statue of Buddha was found.... Thus they created on a kilometric scale, appropriate to a great king, this triad which heretofore had only been produced in small sculptures.... We can hardly doubt that Jayavarman VII looked on himself as a living Buddha (Coedès: 97-98).

This assumption is further verified by the 23 portrait statues of Jayavarman which were consecrated by the name Jayabuddhamahanatha (Woodward, 1994/95). The compound *Buddha-mahanātha* ('Buddha, the Great Protector') prefixed by *Jaya*, the abbreviation of Jayavarman's name, makes it very likely that their name has to be understood as 'The Buddha Jayavarman, the Great Protector'. Coedès

therefore concluded that the consecration of his portrait statues as Jayabuddha-mahanatha in 23 cities, 'most of which were on the outer edges of the kingdom, proclaimed both the political authority of the king and his religious dominance (Coedès, 1966: 100).' Jayavarman's new 'Buddhist policy', its impressive 'government health policy' (ibid.) and state ideology thus seem to have been well-established.

If we try to make out possible causes of its discontinuity after Jayavarman's death, we may have to distinguish between several, admittedly conjectural, reasons. The already mentioned reaction under his successors, particularly the anti-Buddhist iconoclasm under Jayavarman VIII, seems to have been the

handiwork of members of the court elite. Jayavarman VII's quest for Buddhahood and his new Devaraja cult of royal deification in Buddhist disguise must have antagonised, particularly, the powerful Brahmins. But Jayavarman's 'temple policy' may also have been resisted by members of the elite for another reason. As we have just seen in the cases of Ta Prohm and Preah Khan (and one could also mention Beng Mealea and Banteay Chmar, the two equally great temples outside Angkor), his new monumental temple complexes accumulated vast landed property under direct control of his family, most likely at the cost of vested interests of members of the traditional elite. Politically, all these activities, whether intended or unintended, inevitably strengthened royal centralism to a hitherto unknown degree, a development which must have affected particularly the elites of the outlying provinces.

However, in the medium and long term, of much greater significance than these reactions of antagonised traditional elite seem to have been the reaction of the people. They were exhausted and impoverished by endless wars with Champa and by Jayavarman's megalomania (Briggs, 1951: 236; Coedes: 1935) to make them build by forced labour nearly half of the great monuments of Cambodia for his own glorification. Having covered his kingdom with a network

of temples, statues of gods and hospitals in a frenzy of missionary zeal, he expressed his compassion for suffering humanity in the moving language of his inscriptions. But his words could no longer reach a people afflicted by wars and compulsory labour. The people, exhausted by the burden which Jayavarman's Buddhist apotheosis placed upon them, turned to Theravada Buddhism which spread from Sri Lanka across Burma to Cambodia from the end of the 12th century.

It was the socially unbearable burden of Ashoka's '*dhamma* obsession' and Jayavarman's 'architectural megalomania' of self-aggrandisement and ideological overstretch, based upon a hitherto unknown centralism, which caused the decline of their visions.⁴

But Buddhism continued in India after Ashoka by its fruitful symbiosis with Hinduism for more than a millennium, and re-emerged after Jayavarman VII as Theravada Buddhism in mainland Southeast Asia as a genuine state ideology and folk religion, a status which was denied both to Hinayana and Mahayana Buddhism in Brahmin-dominated India. Or would it be more correct to say, a status which Buddhism never aimed at in India?⁵

Notes:

1. That Ashoka carried out his moral teaching very seriously is known from Kharavela's famous Hathigumbha Inscription not far away from Ashoka's Dhuli Major Rock Edicts. About two hundred years after Ashoka's death, Kharavela proudly announced in it that he revived dance and music performances (*tauryatrika*) which had been suspended in the time of the Mauryas (*muriyakala*). See Sahu (1984: 345). For a different reading see Sircar (1967: 218).
2. Romila Thapar doubts the degree to which Ashoka's policies were responsible for the spread of Buddhism in post-Mauryan times. 'It was more linked to traders and artisans and small scale landowners supporting it during that period. Sources from Central Asia, West Asia, Southeast Asia

do not mention Buddhist missions sent by Asoka, but in contrast Sri Lanka made a big thing of it. There are no references to him in these areas other than Buddhist religious texts. The Chinese pilgrims refer to him only when they are travelling within India'(personal communication).

3. For the so-called sixth 'caste', the overseers or spies (episcopoi by Diodorus and ephoroi by Strabo and Arrian) see Thapar (1973: 111) and idem (1987: 32-60).
4. In a personal communication, Peter Sharrock disagrees with Jayavarman's characterisation as a megalomaniac. 'This is perhaps Coedès least inspired interpretation of the king who took the empire to its apogee geographically, in infrastructure and in enlightened social policies. He was certainly a courageous and inspiring Buddhist monarch who modeled himself to an extent on Asoka. Both were perhaps Buddhism-obsessed with far-sighted visions of it as alternative to the Brahmins.'
5. Richard Gombrich commented on an earlier version of this paper: 'I entirely agree with your conclusion, though I might be tempted to put it more strongly. In my view, Buddhism had no state ideology. If there is one why is there no text about it? On the other hand, why do we expect it to have one? Could it not be that we still think of all religions as somehow needing to conform to the model of Christianity. [...] The Buddha taught morality for the individual. He did build an institution, but it was the Sangha; about lay institutions I believe he had nothing whatever to say, since they lay outside his sphere of influence (personal communication)'.

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Hermann Kulke did his Ph.D. in Indology on the temple city of Chidambaram, Freiburg, in 1967; and his D.Litt (Habilitation) on Gajapati kingship and Jagannathcult, Heidelberg, 1975. His post-doctoral study was of Cambodian Language at Yale University and SOAS, London. In his distinguished career he has held important positions and received many awards. He has been Reader in Indian History at the South Asia Institute, Heidelberg; Professor of Asian History, Kiel University; Visiting Professor, Bhubaneswar; Asiatic Society, Kolkata; JNU, New Delhi; Research Fellow, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore; Asia Research Institute, Singapore; Founder Member and Coordinator, respectively, of the Orissa Research Projects of the German Research Council. He received a Gold Medal from the Asiatic Society, Kolkata, and was awarded the Padma Shri Award 2010 (German), Federal Cross of Merit, 1st Class 2011.



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