

A MAGIC PILL
The Protection of Cambodia by The Recitation
of The *Vīṇāśīkhatantra* in A.D. 802

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*Human flesh with unhusked grains added to it, together
with milk of a black cow, this mixture he should sacrifice into the
mouth of a corpse without delay, until the ghost of the deceased rises
and says to him: "What can I do?"*

*One may then beg of him the possessions one desires, O
Illustrious One, a magic pill, gold, and...; a buried [treasure] or
even a kingdom (if he happens to be an exiled prince).*

(*Vīṇāśīkhatantra*, ślokaś 190-192)

The story goes like this: In A.D. 802 King Jayavarman II climbed to the top of a mountain north of present-day Angkor (Phnom Kulen) and performed a ceremony the purpose of which was to protect his kingdom (named *kambujadeśa*) from being dominated by Java. The ceremony involved the recitation of four texts: the *Śiraścheda*, *Vīṇāśīkha*, *Sam̐moha* and *Nayottara*, which are said to be like the four faces of the god Tumvuru. The texts were recited by a Brahman named *Hiraṇyadāma* to the king's priest, Śivakaivalya, and were written down. The ceremony the Brahman performed was according to one of these texts, the *Vīṇāśīkha*, and with this ceremony began the worship of the *devarāja*, about which so much has been written.¹ It also had the purpose of making Jayavarman II a *cakravartin*. This action by Jayavarman –participating in a ceremony based on the *Vīṇāśīkha*, done to protect the kingdom from its enemies, and which resulted in the worship of the *devarāja* and the creation of the king as a *cakravartin*– is the event which begins the Angkor dynasty which will rule Cambodia for the next 500 years.

Several scholars have written about the four texts that were recited on Mt. Kulen, but their textual identifications have remained vague and in terms of suggestions and possibilities. P. C. Bagchi in 1929 proposed some possible relationships with other texts, and attempted to find the textual categories they might be part of, but beyond making clear that they are Tantric texts, no specific extant texts appear to work with Bagchi's suggestions. He does, however, identify the god Tumvuru (or Tumburu) –the god whose four faces issue the texts– as a form of Śiva, even though no extant text to Tumburu was known at that time, and textual references to the name Tumburu designate everything from a *ṛṣi* to a bodhisattva. Other scholars have added helpful studies that include discussions of the role of Tantra in Cambodia (Chatterji 1930 and Chakravarti 1973).

¹ An excellent introduction to *devarāja* scholarship is Kulke 1978.

It appears, however, that a copy of the *Vīṇāśikhatantra* has today been found. Teun Goudriaan published in 1985, along with an English translation and an introduction, a manuscript with this name found in the National Archives of Nepal, a palm leaf manuscript of 396 *ślokas* that Goudriaan dates to the twelfth or thirteenth century. But it is almost impossible to believe that such a text could have been used to found the Angkorian dynasty. See, for example, the quotation at the beginning of this paper. Or here are a few other lines:

Having collected a crow who lived on a Nimba tree, caught by a Śvapāka (member of a despised group), he should sacrifice it in [a fire taken from] a pyre, sprinkled with sesamum oil, while saying these Bījas in inverted order; being clothed in red and black hems, he should recite the Five Bījas in inverted order for a thousand times over these ashes which he has sprinkled with poison and blood; the person whom he touches with these ashes will roam over the earth like a crow, hated by all people, even if he were equal to Indra. (*ślokas* 171-173)

Such full-blown Tantric practices seem totally out of character for ninth-century Cambodia. That it was such a text on which Angkor was founded seems unlikely. My paper explores this possibility.

Certainly, the first question is to ask is if the text Goudriaan has found could be the same (or a similar one to) that mentioned in Jayavarman's founding act. Goudriaan feels it could be. He notes that the *Vīṇāśikhatantra* is dedicated to Śiva as Tumburu, the only text known dedicated exclusively to Tumburu.² Further, the other three texts that were recited in Cambodia along with the *Vīṇāśikha* are also named in the Nepali text: the *Sam̐moha*, *Nayottara*, and *Śīrāścheda*. Goudriaan dedicates several pages in his study tracking down scattered references to Southeast Asian texts (primarily in Bali) that revealed relationships with his *Vīṇāśikhatantra*, suggesting that the text could have been known in Southeast Asia outside of Cambodia as well.

But another important connection between the Nepali manuscript and that mentioned in Cambodia is the text's frequent reference to kingship. Many of the rituals described in the text are a means of protecting the king and of overcoming his enemies, in other words, exactly what Jayavarman says he used the text for. Tumburu is depicted as a sovereign able to bring protection of various kinds—such as from sickness and from enemies—and the adept (the *sādhaka*, such as Jayavarman or Śivakaivalya) is magically able to create safety and welfare. For instance, various rituals are directed at overcoming adversaries and making others your victim:

Having collected human flesh together with sour milk, honey and clarified butter, an immediate total uprooting [of the enemy is effectuated] by a sacrifice of eight thousand libations. (*śloka* 162)

² The various textual references to Tumburu are outlined by Goudriaan, which he divides as to Tumburu as a Gandharva and to Tumburu as Śiva. Ibid.: 18-23.

Many of the rituals are intended for rulers:

the practitioner should also meditate on the victim as being of a red colour; at the end of the sacrifice, he should imagine the victim as being out of his mind and benumbed, struck on his head by the Elephant-goad and bound by the māyic noose; even a king or a queen he will subjugate within a week. (*śloka* 160-161)

There are other rituals that result in rulers overcoming other rulers: One ritual produces the power so that: "one is able quickly to subjugate a ruler puffed up in conceit" (*śloka* 177) and another so that: "One may then beg of him [a ghost]...a kingdom (if he happens to be an exiled prince)" (*śloka* 192, quoted in full above).

An important question, however, is how accurate are the events in the Jayavarman story itself? The narrative is recorded in perhaps the most famous of all the many Cambodian inscriptions, the Sdok Kak Thom inscription – that dates to 1057, and is thus some 250 years later than the events it outlines that took place on Mt. Kulen in 802. The Sdok Kak Thom inscription's distance in time from Jayavarman's action has left several scholars skeptical of the narrative. It is a shock (to say the least) when one learns that the very term *devarāja*, which is the Sanskrit for "god-king," about which scholars have debated for a century and which has come to represent the particular form of Khmer religion, appears only one time in all of the hundreds of inscriptions, indeed, in only the Sdok Kak Thom inscription. The inscription is written in Sanskrit and in Khmer, with stanzas in both that outline Jayavarman's initializing acts. It is here that we get the Khmer equivalent for *devarāja* as "kamrateñ jagat ta rāja" (= God who is king).³

The amount of scholarship now on this term, and on the Sdok Kak Thom inscription, is enormous, and the many problems they present cannot be reviewed here. Even George Coedès, the most important crafter of the Jayavarman story, recognized late in his career the problems using the Sdok Kak Thom inscription to recreate events during Jayavarman's reign (Coedès 1970). Although Jayavarman reigned for over 50 years, he left no inscriptions of his own (which in itself is a great enigma), and thus we have nothing directly associated with him with which to compare the events outlined in the Sdok Kak Thom inscription. Most recently, scholars such as Michael Vickery (1998), Claude Jacques (1997: 256), and Paul Lavy (2000) have come close to calling these events outright fictional creations of the eleventh-century writers of the Sdok Kak Thom inscription.

My own inclination is not to go this far; in fact, I don't agree with them. Focusing on the *Vīṇāsikha* text: Does it make more sense to say this text was known in eleventh-century than in ninth-century Cambodia? And does the unique reference to Tumvuru fit better later? Would the notion of using these texts to protect the king from enemies through Tantric rituals fit better at the later date? One might initially be tempted to find the eleventh century more likely to reveal Tantric religious evidence than the ninth. The earliest inscription that clearly indicates the presence of Vajrayāna in Cambodia is dated 1066 (Prapandvidya 1990), and the earliest artistic evidence is at the Phimai temple (in present-day northeastern Thailand) dating to the beginning of the twelfth century (Woodward 2003: 153-5). At just the same time (1100) we have the first inscriptional evidence for Āgamic Śivaism. It is also the eleventh century when Vajrayāna deities begin

³ The Khmer phrase "kamrateñ jagat ta rāja," as with the Sanskrit "devarāja," is open to a number of possible English translations. A handy discussion of the phrase is in Vickery 1998, pp. 423-6.

to be depicted, images such as Hevajra, which become ever more popular in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

But it can also be argued that the eighth and ninth centuries were a period of explosive Tantric religious development and spread. This is most easily traced in Buddhism rather than Hinduism, of course, due to the constant movement of monks between India and areas east (Southeast Asia, China, and Japan) who kept records of their travels. Again, scholars have fully documented the names of monks and the texts involved. The Indonesian islands were apparently of particular importance for the spread of Buddhist Tantrism, with such teachers as Vajrabodhi and his student, Amoghavajra, studying there in the eighth century.

But I want to argue that this search for organized Tantric religion may lead us astray. In fact, what happened on Mt. Kulen in 802 was something very different. It was Jayavarman receiving a private *dikṣā* from his guru. This is clear from the *Vīṇāśikhatantra* – it was not meant as a public text or to guide a group ritual. It is for an individual. It is private and even secret. Once this is understood, the "problem" of the *devarāja* and of the Sdok Kak Thom inscription itself takes a new twist and can be seen in a different light. The reason the Sdok Kak Thom inscription was written was not as a history, but for the honor of its subject and patron, a man named Sadāśiva, who was the guru of the current king Udayādityavarman II (1050-1066) and keeper of the *devarāja* and its ritual. Sadāśiva used the inscription to trace back through his family to the first keeper of the *devarāja*, that is back to Śivakaivalya who first received the ritual on Mt. Kulen in 802. The inscription names each of the kings since Jayavarman up to Udayādityavarman and says the family of Śivakaivalya's ancestors had kept the ritual alive for those 250 years acting as hereditary priests. Most of the long inscription is dedicated to the present circumstances, particularly to the gifts and land given to the family by the present ruler, and this is clearly its main purpose.

Thus, we see that it is only happenstance that the subject of the Tantric texts and the *devarāja* comes up at all. The cult and its priests were gurus to the kings whose duties were private individual actions directed toward the welfare of the king, and through him of the kingdom. This is why we do not have any other inscriptions about these events: they were not public events. This is why we do not have images: they were not public images (if there were any but envisioned images, in any regard). The outlining of the *devarāja* ritual is revealed only through the pride and boasting of the guru in an inscription that did not have it as the main purpose of the inscription in the first place.

A parallel might be drawn to the report we get from the Chinese envoy Chou Ta-kuan who was in Angkor in 1296 which tells us that the king each night slept with a snake goddess in the tower of the Phimeanakas (Pelliot 1951: 12). If the *nāginī* were not to appear, or the king to miss a night's tryst, it would spell disaster for the king (and thus for the kingdom). Nowhere is this written in an inscription nor depicted in imagery, and we know it only because Chou Ta-kuan heard about it during his stay. We cannot know if previous Khmer kings performed this ritual, but it mimics the founding myth of the Khmer, and was probably part of Khmer kingship long before the thirteenth century. But, like the Tantric ritual performed on Mt. Kulen, it was a private ritual, one that was not the subject of inscriptions or art, that is, not a part of kingship that was considered appropriate for public display.

Thus, if I am correct, we have to rethink completely our idea of the *devarāja* and of Cambodian kingship and religion. The *devarāja*, probably an image of Śiva as Tumburu as progenitor of the Tantric texts, but perhaps only the god presented as a description to be imagined, was at the center of private Tantric rituals for the Khmer kings used to maintain their sovereignty and power for at least 250 years. It was never intended to be inscribed in stone, and we know of it only through the enthusiasm of Sadāśiva.

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