A History of South-East Asia

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as a hunter of elephants. Several foundations in the neighbourhood of Angkor date from his reign, but no inscriptions. He was succeeded in 877 by a cousin, who became Indravarman I and made his mark upon Khmer history. A tenth-century inscription describes him as a nephew of Jayavarman II's queen. The importance of matrilineal descent is clearly indicated by the matrilineal genealogies given in inscriptions. Indravarman's queen traced her descent back to the royal families of Chenla and Funan. Through her he acquired rights over Sambhupura, which had not been exercised by his predecessors. He was the first Khmer king to undertake irrigation works in the Angkor region. When he constructed a huge artificial lake north of his capital for the storage of water needed for irrigation during the dry season, he was doing something of supreme importance to the subsequent development of the Khmer monarchy. The priority he gave to irrigation set a fashion followed by his successors.

His Bakong temple, built to house the royal linga, Indresvara, was also a new departure in Khmer history: it was the first stone pyramid to be constructed, being composed of five superimposed terraces with the shrine at the top. Archaeologists have noted a strong resemblance between it and the Borobudur, and the question has been asked whether Indravarman hoped to rival the achievements of the Sailendras. In 879 he dedicated statues of his parents, his maternal grandparents and of Jayavarman II and his queen to the Preah Ko, a collection of six towers on a single terrace. These two monuments together with the temple of Lolei built by his successor at the time of Indravarman's death form the 'Roluos group' which is considered to mark the beginning of classical Khmer art. They exemplify the Khmer form of ancestor-worship; the identification of the human being with a god is indicated by the use of the first part of the name plus -esvara for a man or -devi for a woman. Indravarman I's few inscriptions are the earliest long ones. In one he is called 'Lion among kings'.

Indravarman I's son and successor, Yasovarman I, began his reign with the construction of a vast reservoir measuring seven kilometres by two, into which the waters of the Siemreap River were made to flow by changing its course. It came to be known as the Eastern Baray. In the second year of his reign he laid out a new capital, named after him Yasodharapura, the first city of Angkor. It was built around a natural hill, Phnom Bakheng, and enclosed an area of about sixteen square miles. A moat 200 metres wide enclosed it. Within this enclosure was an agglomeration of villages and markets interspersed with paddy fields. No less than 800 artificial water pools have been discovered within this enclosure arranged in a geometric pattern around the base of Phnom Bakheng. The 'Mountain of Yasovarman' was a hill of five terraces faced with masonry. On its summit were five square sandstone towers forming a quincunx, the central one housing the royal linga, Yasodharaesvara. Like other dynastic temples it was conceived as a model of Mount Meru with the Siemreap River as its sacred Ganges. Yasovarman's city and its successor, Jayavarman VII's Angkor Thom, built late in the twelfth century, overlap. But the Phnom Bakheng is just outside the southern wall of Angkor Thom.

Yasovarman's passion for building led him to crown nearly every hill near his capital with a shrine. His best-known foundation today is Preah Vihear, which has been the subject of bitter controversy between Thailand and Cambodia. It crowns a triangular promontory in the Dangrek Mountains nearly 1600 feet above the plain, and is one of the great achievements of Khmer architecture. He had about a hundred monasteries built throughout his kingdom for Saivite, Vaishnavite and Buddhist sects. These 'Yasodharashrama' were of wood, and each included a royal pavilion for the king's use when touring the kingdom. Twelve of them have been discovered in recent times.

Little is known of the political history of these reigns, or of those that follow up to the end of the tenth century. Yasovarman's inscriptions pay him the most fulsome tributes as a warrior. If the inscription of 947 at Baksei Chamrong is reliable, his dominions extended as widely as those of Funan in her greatest days. If he reigned for only eleven years, and carried out so vast a building programme, it is difficult to believe that he had the time and the means to acquire a far-flung empire extending to China in the north, Champa on the east and the Indian Ocean on the west, with the northern part of the Malay Peninsula as far as P'an-P'an (Grahi) included. Briggs suggests that even if he was not responsible for the expansion represented by these boundaries, the territories included in them acknowledged his overlordship. Doubt has been thrown on 900 as the real year of his death. On the available evidence he could have reigned until nearly 910, it is thought. His inscriptions cover only the area between southern Laos and the Gulf of Siam, and not farther west than Chantabun. Champa on the east of his kingdom and the Mon states of the Meam valley were certainly independent. Briggs expresses the opinion that 'more misinformation has probably been written about Yasovarman than about any other king of Cambodian history' and that much that has been attributed to him belongs to a later period. One example of this