

Considerations on the Chronology and History of 9th Century Cambodia

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According to the dates given by George Coedès in many of his publications, it seemed clear that the kingdom of Cambodia was ruled in the 9th century AD by a succession of kings in the following order: Jayavarman II (802-850), Jayavarman III (850-877), Indravarman I (877-889) and Yasovarman I (889-900 or later).

Some of these dates were questioned later by Claude Jacques according to whom the accession of Jayavarman III took place in 834 AD for reasons which will be discussed below, and ended also earlier than 877. It is of some importance that Yasovarman I was mentioned as ruler for the Saka year 829 (907/08 AD) in the inscription of Phnom Bakhen of King Jayavarman V (K. 558), dated Saka 890 (968/69 AD).

Moreover, for Coedès Jayavarman II was one of the most important kings who, coming from a country called Javâ, overthrew its suzerainty and changed his capital very often in a series of battles. After his death he was endowed with the posthumous name Paramesvara, which seems to be a kind of consecration. Until today this chronology and history is the base of nearly all modern historiographies of Cambodia.

First of all, as we know, the elaborate history of Jayavarman II, including the date of his accession, was not derived from contemporary sources, but from inscriptions of the 11th century AD. The story which connects him with «Javâ» can be found only in inscriptions of Suryavarman's successor Udayadityavarman II: the story of the «adventures» of Jayavarman II and the recurring change of his capital is known only from one source, the Sdok Kak Thom inscription (K. 235) dated 8th February 1053 AD.

However, Jayavarman II was mentioned in earlier inscriptions, albeit only as the one who settled at mount Mahendra identified with the Phnom Kulen. In earlier inscriptions Jayavarman II is no extraordinary king who as a hero liberated his country from foreign sovereignty. He is only one king in a line of other kings, even in the Prê Rup inscription of king Rajendravarman II dated 961/62 AD in which Jayavarman II is named casually in connection with the king Puskaraksa, who was the maternal uncle of the mother of Jayavarman's mother (stanza IX), which is in accordance with the Lolei inscription (K. 323). However,

the moving of capitals, is also of some importance as it was Jayavarman II who founded the nucleus of the later capital Angkor.

Coedès and his successors did omit or suppress the kings between Jayavarman III and Indravarman I, viz. Rudravarman and Prthivindravarman, who were connected with their predecessors by marriage relations. These kings are listed in the 9th century inscriptions as «normal» kings preceding Indravarman I who was the son of Prthivindravarman. There is no reason to believe that those rulers were only royal kinsfolk, an assumption which contradicts the information given in the stanzas of Prah Ko and Lolei. The fact that these kings are not mentioned in the Prê Rup inscription is not astonishing because the ruling king (Rajendravarman II) was interested in naming his royal ancestors; for this reason one cannot find Indravarman in it, nor even his successors.

Any attempt, however, to arrive at the historical truth has to take into account the inscriptions of the 9th century which bear information going back to the pre-Angkorian period of the 8th century - to the realm called Zhenla by the Chinese. Their contents are not uniform but they do not contradict each other.

The sources of information are inscriptions which belong to the temples of Prah Kô and Bakon built by Indravarman and to the sanctuary of Lolei built by Yasovarman, all situated in the residence town of Hariharalaya, the present-day Roluos, 15 km southeast of Siem Reap. On the foundation stele of the Prah Ko temple dedicated on 25th January 880 AD the ruler names his royal ancestors Rudravarman (his maternal grandfather), Nrpatriindravarman II (his maternal great-grandfather) and Prthivindravarman (his father), without referring to the kings Jayavarman II and III. The donor of this temple was Indravarman. There is not the slightest hint that the rulers mentioned in the inscription could have ruled in another place or in another area than the Angkorian.

Coedès did not discuss this problem, and Dupont («La dislocation du Tchen-la et la formation du Cambodge angkorien <VII^e-IX^e siècle>», p. 35) dated Rudravarman ca.

750-770 and Nŗpatindravarman II ca. 720-740, avoiding to assign them to a certain region.

Nevertheless, the given dates are obviously too early since - as we have ascertained - Rudravarman was Indravarman's maternal grandfather and therefore Rudravarman's daughter and his son-in-law Prthivindravarman must have lived in the year of his (Rudravarman's) supposed death in ca. 770 AD.

Both were probably already of marriageable age, which would make Prthivindravarman a very old man of more than one hundred years at the commencement of Indravarman's reign; Dupont too, was careful enough not to date him. Again, supposing that Dupont's date of 770 AD were right, and supposing that Prthivindravarman had a normal lifespan and died much earlier than 877/78 AD, the question of chronology arises anew when we consider the age of his son Indravarman, who must have been born by ca. 790 AD at the latest according to the calculation of Dupont. It can therefore be concluded that he (Indravarman) must have reached an age of nearly a hundred years.

While Dupont assigns other rulers to a certain region, he remained silent in these cases. At any rate, his dating seems to be arbitrary and is based on maintaining in the established succession of kings: Jayavarman II, Jayavarman III, Indravarman. Even if we trust the accession dates of Jayavarman II (802/03) and Jayavarman III (850/51 or 835/36) - mentioned in very late inscriptions (of the 11th century) - there is no compelling reason to deny the supposition that there could not nonetheless have been two successors to the latter before Indravarman, even though in this case they would have had only short periods of reign. No inscription maintains that Indravarman was the immediate successor of Jayavarman III; this is only the conclusion of scholars who edited and translated these inscriptions.

Moreover, that the sanctuary of Prah Kô consisting of six towers, for three deceased kings and their wives served as an ancestor temple, has not been considered satisfactorily: the central towers were assigned to Jayavarman II (under his posthumous name Paramesvara) and his spouse Dharanindradevi, the northern ones for Rudravarman (consecrated as Rudresvara) and Narendradevi, the southern towers for Prthivindravarman (consecrated as Prthivindresvara) and Prthivindradevi (see I.S.C.C., pp. 301 ff.).

It is remarkable that this sanctuary was dedicated to the founder of the new capital (who was married to the sister of Prthivindravarman) and to the maternal grandfather and

the father of the ruling king, but not to Jayavarman III, the son of Jayavarman II; the reason for this seems to be that he died childless, but it is not clear whether the childlessness was because of his premature death or because of other reasons.

There are some hints of death at a young age since his youth is repeatedly referred to¹; but it is likely that many kings assumed power at a young age, without this being emphasized in a special way; it is possible that Jayavarman III was known as a young king only because he did not reach an old age.

This would explain, too, why the Lolei inscription emphasized that Rudravarman was the «younger brother» (jaghanyaja) of the mother's mother of Jayavarman III. This is probably a hint that he was not much older than his niece, while Jayavarman II at the time of his marriage to her was probably no longer a young man.

These assumptions are not compelling, but it is possible that a prematurely deceased Jayavarman III was succeeded by a relatively older Rudravarman. Despite his childlessness Jayavarman III was remembered in the inscription of the Bakon temple - built very close to the Prah Kô - (dedicated in 881/82 AD) largely contains repetitions of the stanzas of the former sanctuary, including the stanzas of the descendance of the rulers; but stanza XXX is added stating that the ruling king had erected an image named Visnusvamin for the king who had gone to Visnuloka (= Jayavarman III): the name Visnuloka was used in later inscriptions as posthumous name of Jayavarman III.

In connection with Jayavarman II we should focus on a king whose name was also Jayavarman and who left two dated inscriptions: one from Prah That Prah Srei south of Kompon Cham (K. 103, see I. C., V, p. 33; dated the 5th tithi of the dark fortnight of the month Madhava of the Saka year 692 = 20th April 770) and from Lobo'k Srot in the vicinity of Kraceh near Sambhupura (K. 134, see I. C., II, pp. 92 ff., dated Saka year 703 = 28th February 781 - 18th March 782). Coedès classified this king provisionally as Jayavarman I^{bis}, since the numbers I und II already had been attributed to other rulers of the same name.

It seems that he sometimes had the idea that Jayavarman I^{bis} and Jayavarman II might be identical, but he rather chose the dates 802 (Saka 724) and 850 (Saka 772), i. e. in «Les capitales de Jayavarman II.», B.E.F.E.O. 28 (1928), p. 119. He also did not take into account a defective date in an inscription of the Baphûon temple (K. 583; I. C. VII, pp. 84 ff.) during the time of King Rajendravarman II (944-968 AD) in which it is written that king Paramesvara (= Jayavarman II) enjoyed his rule in the Saka year x12. For

chronological reasons only a 7 is possible as a first number: so the restituted date is Saka 712 (= 790/91 AD) which was rejected by Coedès categorically as a mistake².

One may in fact ask about the historical value of that date, but it was incised earlier than the constantly cited year Saka 724, i. e., at a time much closer to the event in question. An important question arises from the comparison of the testified datings of Jayavarman I^{bis} with the list of kings in the Lolei inscription since it is an undisputed fact that the text of the latter bears only two, and not three, Jayavarmans, and it seems relatively unlikely that it should not have mentioned a king who is known by his own inscriptions and who ruled in the region of Sambhupura (at least in the years 770 and 781/82). Since Jayavarman II did not create this foundation ex nihilo, one can easily imagine that he had been active before in other places.

The analysis of the contemporary sources and the lists/genealogies of kings of the 9th century shows that identifying Jayavarman I^{bis} as Jayavarman II does not seem impossible, even though we cannot be absolutely certain. Jacques shared this opinion³, but meanwhile he has again revised his opinion stating now that Jayavarman I^{bis} and Jayavarman II are two different personalities, assuming that the latter was crowned twice, in the year 790 (the already above mentioned date Saka [7]12) and in the year 802⁴, as well as that he became king at young age⁵. On the other hand, there is no doubt for Vickery that Jayavarman II is identical with Jayavarman I^{bis6}.

Moreover, none of the early or late inscriptions - including the Sdok Kak Thom inscription with its counting of the frequent change of the capitals - give an explanation for the choice of one or several new capitals (the early inscriptions speak of only one).

The date Saka 724 (802/03 AD) is based on five inscriptions, four incised during the rule of Suryavarman I (1001/02-1049)⁷, and the latest one of Udayadityavarman II (1049-1067)⁸, all more than 200 years after the event in question. Indeed, these are not independent sources. The date contradicts the already mentioned defective date Saka x12 [712] (790/91 AD), so that we have only two independent sources from different times (from the time between 944 and 968 and the time between 1001/02 and 1049). It seems rather doubtful whether one of these dates has any value at all as the earlier inscriptions of the 9th century lack any dates related to these events.

In addition, it is remarkable that there is a tendency in those late inscriptions to fill in the period before and after 877/78 with events - mostly donations - which are not cor-

roborated by contemporary sources. The inscription of Pràsàt Kòk Pò, a temple in the area of Angkor proper which became the capital during the reign of Yasovarman, narrates the story of a priestly family and the donations received by it. There is a strong suspicion that the donor of this inscription explicitly wanted to place the origin of this priestly family into the time of the founding father Jayavarman II and to emphasize the antiquity of the donations, since nothing is known of them from earlier documents. Information concerning the donation of an image of Hari (Siva) dated Monday, at a total eclipse of the moon in the Saka year 779 from the Pràsàt Kòk Pò inscription (Pillar II, stanza 10) is not really trustworthy despite the fact that the date can be verified as Monday, the 22nd June 856⁹, which is also confirmed by Oppolzer's *Canon der Finsternisse*¹⁰.

Kielhorn¹¹ had pointed out that especially total eclipses mentioned in inscriptions were not always actually observed eclipses, but calculated ones since eclipses are auspicious moments, when donations are particularly meritorious. They were therefore probably selected for such occasions, and must accordingly have been calculated beforehand - or afterwards.

Without maintaining with certainty that these dates and events were «invented» very much later, it seems nonetheless problematical to adopt as a definite fact all the information supplied in later sources for an earlier period without critically examining the sources in question. The same can be said about the supposed dating of the accession of Jayavarman III.

Of the three inscriptions in question one is evidently, and the other most probably from the time of Suryavarman I, with the third belonging to the time of Jayavarman V. The date of an inscription in Khmer language, that of Pràsàt Cak (K. 521), written in the 11th c., was read by Coedès in his first publication (B.E.F.E.O. XXVIII, 1928, pp. 115 ff.) as 791, and his translation shows that Jayavarman III had been ruling then for 16 years.

After the discovery of the stele of Tùol Ta Pec likewise in the 11th century (K. 834, (see *I. C.*, V, pp. 244 ff.), where it is mentioned that Jayavarman III became king in the Saka year 772, Coedès revised his reading of the number in the inscription of Pràsàt Cak (in *I. C.*, IV, pp. 167 ff.) from 791 into 772. He justified this change in his article «Nouvelles précisions...» on p. 13, maintaining now that the number of the decimal (previously read as 9) differs only slightly from the number in the three-digit («le chiffre des dizaines, s'il diffère légèrement de celui des centaines qui est et ne peut être qu'un 7"); even the new reading of the one-digit is based on similar arguments. It seems, that his change of mind was

strongly influenced by the date of the inscription of Tùol Ta Pec as his translation also was changed now saying that Jayavarman III became king in the year 772.

Claude Jacques in «Sur les données chronologiques de la stèle de Tùol Ta Pec» (Etudes d'épigraphie cambodgiennes, VI, B.E.F.E.O. 58, 1971, pp. 163-176) also arrives at the number 772, but prefers the old translation of the inscription of Pràsàt Cak.

In addition, there are other inscriptions mentioning Jayavarman III which contradict this accession date or their content is generally doubtful. In that of Kôk Rusei (K. 175, I. C. VI, pp 173 ff.) dated Wednesday, 5th tithi of the bright fortnight of the month Pusya of the Saka year 90x, when the moon was in the Naksatra Purvabhadra (my calculation came to the result that the Saka year 902 was meant; therefore the date corresponds to Wednesday, 15th December 980 AD) Coedès changed another date contrary to the earlier reading of Aymonier from Saka 791 to 891 and attributed it to the ruling king Jayavarman V. This date was

uncritically accepted by Jacques.

But there is no doubt that this king commenced his reign in the Saka year 890 (his first recorded inscription as king dates from 5th June 968 AD¹²), and so the date (791 or 891) is in any case wrong; Jayavarman III is also mentioned in the Pràsàt Prei Kmen inscription (K. 774, I. C. IV, pp. 64 ff.), which was incised after the Saka year 911 (989/90 AD, the last given date), saying: «His Majesty who has gone to the world of Visnu (= Jayavarman III)» offered one palanquin in the Saka year 782 (860/61 AD); then the information follows that under the reign of the king «who has gone to the world of Paramasiva (= Yasovarman I)», on Tuesday, the 3rd day of the dark fortnight of the month Jyestha of the Saka year 817 (Tuesday, 15th April 895 AD) a donation was made to that sanctuary. The value of all those late datings is in fact doubtful.

ABBREVIATIONS

ASEMI - Asie du sud-est monde insulindien

B.E.F.E.O. - Bulletin de l'Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient

I. C. - Inscriptions du Cambodge. éditées et traduites par Georges Coedès. Vol. I-VIII. Hanoi, Paris 1937-1966 (Collection de Textes et Documents sur l'Indochine: III).

I. S. C. C. - Inscriptions sanscrites de Campa et du Cambodge. éd. et trad. par Auguste Barth et Abel Bergaigne. Paris 1885-93.

K. - Kamboja inscriptions

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NOTES

¹ For instance, in the inscriptions of Baksei Camkron, stanza XXII, and of Pràsàt Cak (K. 521), translated by Coedès twice with different meanings; in the second translation (I. C. IV, pp. 167 ff; for the discussion of it see below) he assumed power at the age of 16.

² See I. C. VII, S. 87, note 1: «Une date se terminant par 12 ne peut appartenir au règne de Paramesvara = Jayavarman II qui commença en 724. Il faut donc envisager une correction (mais on ne voit pas laquelle, car les chiffres 1 et 2 sont très nets).

³ Claude Jacques, «La carrière de Jayavarman II», pp. 205-220.

⁴ Jacques, «On Jayavarman II», p. 2. For him, Jayavarman II was consecrated in 802 AD as Cakravartin (see Jacques, «Nouvelles orientations...», p. 49: «... par la suite, après sa consécration comme *cakravartin* sur le mont Mahendra en 802, ...»).

⁵ Thus in Angkor, Cities and Temples, published in 1997, on p. 61: «In 790 AD a young prince became king, taking the name of Jayavarman II. ... He had come from 'Java' where he is assumed to have been 'held prisoner' with his family. Jacques here returned to Coedès' theory of the jeune prince and accepted without any discussion the «Java» story, to which he added «and his family», not derivable from any source at all.

⁶ So in Society, Economics, pp. 393 ff., where he refuted Jacques' recent hypothesis of two different king: «This new synthesis apparently means that inscriptions K.103 and K.134, at least the former, again refer to a mysterious Jayavarman Ibis.» (p. 396). This coincides with my considerations, although I hesitate to see the identification fully corroborated.

⁷ The inscriptions in question are 1) Prah Vihar (K. 382, see I.S.C.C. No LXI, pp. 525 ff., stanza A 4, see also I. C. VI, p. 270; Coedès explains here, that this inscription belongs to the time of Suryavarman I); 2) Pràsàt Kòk Pò (K. 256, see B.E.F.E.O. 37 (1937), pp. 479-413: esp. p. 389, stanza 4); 3) Prah Kev (K. 728, see I.S.C.C., pp. 106 und 112, stanza 2); and 4) Trapan Run (K. 598, see Jacques, «La carrière de Jayavarman II», p. 206, stanza 14). R. C. Majumdar, «The date of accession of Jayavarman II», indeed says that the Saka year 724 meant the date of accession of Jayavarman II, but this by no means says anything about the truth of it.

⁸ Inscription of Prah Nòk (K. 289), I.S.S.C., pp. 140 ff., dated Friday, 16th February 1067 (the reading of the date by Barth as *astastanavabhih krsnamaghomahninavarake* should be corrected into *astastanavabhih krsnamaghe 'mahninavarake*, i. e., in the [Saka year 988, in the dark fortnight of the month of Magha, on the new-moon day [amahni], on the in-a-day [Friday or Sunday]).

⁹ The Saka year 779 is a current year - the year 857 AD mentioned by Coedès and Dupont is based only on the usual addition of the given year [779] + 78, a calculation which is not satisfactory at all.

¹⁰ Theodor Ritter von Oppolzer, *Canon der Finsternisse*, Wien 1887, p. 356.

¹¹ Franz Kielhorn, «Die Sonnen- und Mondfinsternisse in den Daten indischer Handschriften», *Göttinger Nachrichten* 1896, pp. 59-75.

¹² Inscription of Bantay Srei (K. 842, see I. C. I, pp. 151 ff.) dated «Friday, 7th tithi of the bright fortnight of the month Asadha of the Saka year 890).

