sometimes are as insightful as the chapters themselves. In essence, it is an excellent volume to dip in and out of.

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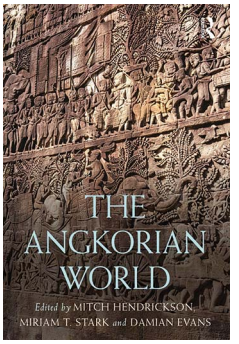

Since the end of the Khmer Rouge dark age, Angkorian studies have undergone a renaissance which is now encapsulated in this remarkable volume. Enabled and supported by the Apsara Authority, a new generation of Khmer scholars have united with foreign specialists to distil a wealth of new information on virtually every aspect of the origins, history, society, economy, the industry and the environment of the Angkorian world into a single volume. With its six sections comprising 35 chapters and 90 contributors *The Angkorian World* indeed has a global intent.

The late sixteenth-century archives of the Portuguese Indies in Lisbon contain reports from the first Europeans to encounter Angkor: describing a great stone city, abandoned and overcome by the jungle. At that time, they thought it impossible that indigenous people had created the city; Alexander the Great or Emperor Trajan were suggested as being responsible. In 1861 Henri Mouhot wrote (and it was posthumously published) that Angkor Wat was erected by some ancient Michelangelo. During the French colonial period, western scholarly enquiry began in earnest and the Mission archéologique d'Indo-Chine, which later became the École française d'Extrême Orient, was founded in Saigon in 1898. This was dominated by Georges Cœdès, whose magisterial translation of the Angkorian inscriptions underwrote the construction of the dynastic sequence and listed the names of the sovereigns who ruled from Angkor between AD 802 and the mid-fifteenth century. Given the virtual absence of any information on the prehistoric societies in Southeast Asia, whom Cœdès described as poor savages still in the Stone Age, there was a widely held view that the civilization of Angkor owed its being to Indianisation. The notion was easily understood at the time owing to the use of the Sanskrit language, the worship of Hindu gods, Buddhism and the influence in Europe of South Asian art and architecture.

At the onset of this Angkorian world a rise of entrenched social inequality is first identified among coastal communities of the Mekong Delta, exposed to burgeoning maritime exchange that brought Indian and Chinese goods, ideas and visitors to Southeast Asia. Miriam Stark

and Pierre-Yves Manguin trace the formation of urban communities at Oc Eo and Angkor Borei, both commanding the Mekong Delta. The authors argue that both urban areas comprised a series of interlocking polities populated by rulers with Sanskrit names and were socially enhanced through their close relationships with the Hindu gods Vishnu and Shiva. By the sixth century, inland agrarian polities began to dominate, the best known being based at Isanapura. It was from one of these, some ephemeral and others more durable, that Jayavarman II, a Khmer prince, emerged to found the state of Angkor, traditionally dated to AD 802. This event, documented in the eleventh-century Sdok Kak Thom inscription, has long been a 'Rubicon crossing' in the history of Angkor. In their consideration of early capitals, Jean-Baptiste Chevance and Christophe Pottier have described a new and convincing model that rather stresses continuity. This is evidenced for example in the pre-Angkorian centre of Bhavapura and the complex of temples, palace and reservoir at Hariharalaya with its early occupation now identified through excavations. The Sdok Kak Thom inscription also described the consecration of Jayavarman II at Mahendraparvata on the Kulen Upland. A lidar survey on this heavily forested region has now laid bare the plan of his city: Banteay, a vast early capital replete with its palace, roads, reservoirs and temple mountain; a capital that barely outlived the reign of its founder.

The same Kulen Massif feeds the sacred rivers that flow south to Angkor and have filled the four huge rectangular reservoirs for over three centuries, which progressively gave rise in the 1950s to French archaeologist Bernard-Philipp Groslier's notion of the 'hydraulic city'. Remote sensing survey shows that the land between the reservoirs and the Great Lake was crammed with bounded rice fields, and there is a long ongoing debate about the objectives of building these reservoirs, the largest of which covers 16km^2 and can contain 53 million m^3. Did they supply water to irrigate the rice fields, or were they purely symbolic, or even both? In their chapter Terry Lustig and colleagues find little tangible evidence for the outlets that would have filled irrigation canals when the monsoon rains faltered, as they often did and still do. The corpus of inscriptions fails to record any disputes over the allocation of water, nor did the thirteenth-century Chinese visitor Zhou Daguan mention irrigation in his memoire. This source, however, mentions a bronze image of the Buddha in one of the island temples that feature on each reservoir. A gilded bronze statue of the reclining Vishnu can now be identified as the mentioned image and is dated to the reign of Suryavarman II, builder of Angkor Wat. On balance, the authors now see the reservoirs as more symbolic than practical, burnishing the royal image and symbolising the recreation of the universe.

Most of the great sandstone temples, be they at Angkor or beyond, were covered by so much forest growth that it was virtually impossible to assess what lay within the moated enclosures. Lidar scanning of these areas has now revealed urban planning with a precise grid of streets, canals, house mounds and ponds.

The book delivers insights in many more areas of the city. We learn of the quarries and the infrastructure to take thousands of tons of stone to their chosen destinations. In the palace precinct of Angkor Thom, bronze foundries have been identified that were capable of

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casting a 6m-long bronze statue embellished with mercury gilding. Iron came from the mines around the huge complex at Preah Khan of Kompong Svay. Furthermore, ceramics, weaving, the collection of wax and honey, the role of draught cattle and water buffaloes are all given their due. Pollen analyses and the flotation of excavated deposits have enlarged our understanding of the environment and economy. We can follow the roads, bridges, hospitals and rest houses of the transport network that brought a plethora of products to the central marketplaces where exchanges were transacted without any minted currency.

Angkor is described as one of, if not the, largest preindustrial cities on earth and it is essential to understand the underlying social fabric. This book illuminates the deification of the sovereigns over three major dynasties and the durability of the grandee noble families with their court roles and landed estates. From inscriptions and depictions on the bas reliefs, we know of the responsibilities of the bureaucracy in which relative status was signalled *inter alia* by the ornaments on the parasols. On the other side of society there was the overwhelming amount of toil needed to till the rice fields and work on the construction of monuments. For example, there were countless tons of stone that needed to be precisely laid in place before being carved into the world's longest series of bas reliefs.

Zhou Daguan lived at Angkor in 1296–7 and encountered a thriving city. An enduring question is why, less than two centuries later, it was abandoned as the capital. Damian Evans and colleagues place the word collapse within inverted commas when considering this issue, after all, the Khmer monarchy continues in unbroken sequence to this day, albeit relocated first to Udong and now Phnom Penh. Traditionally, the 'collapse' has been ascribed to Thai invasions, the adoption of Theravada Buddhism or the spread of disease. More recently, destruction of the water infrastructure by intense monsoon variability has been cited. New evidence, based in part on palynological data, suggests a more gradual adjustment and population changes at different timescales in the various centres as well as at Angkor itself.

The weight of information contained in *The Angkorian World* is at times overwhelming and it is impossible to formulate a short review that includes everything. It would be hard to identify any early state anywhere that has such complete and convincing documentation. This multi-faceted and fascinating synthesis of Angkor will endure for years to come.

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