

## **Kīrtipaṇḍita and the Tantras**

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*(abstract) This paper re-examines epigraphic and artistic evidence left from the revival of Buddhism in Cambodia in the mid-10<sup>th</sup> century, and questions the consensus view that Khmer Buddhism was far removed from the Tantrism which was rooting itself in Tibet at the same period. Indeed, it finds hard evidence for the arrival of the Tantras in Angkor. This epigraphic evidence is found to be supported by the iconography of the Buddhist caityas and sculptures of the Khmer 'Khleang style' of the last quarter of that century and the conclusion is that the Buddhism revived in Cambodia in the 10<sup>th</sup> century was the tantric Vajrayāna.*

Little is known about the doctrines and rituals of the religions of ancient Cambodia from what has survived in the remnants of their texts and temples. Temple inscriptions focus on invocations of the gods, eulogies of patrons and maintenance provision, not doctrine. But there is one illuminating exception which, strangely, has not received the attention it deserves. From the time when Buddhism was allowed to revive in Brahmanical Cambodia in the mid-10<sup>th</sup> century, under Śaiva king Rājendravarman II, one temple engraving provides rare and revealing insights into the beliefs of the Cambodian Buddhists. The stone honours the Buddhist *purohita* or high priest Kīrtipaṇḍita ('renowned teacher') at the temple of Wāt Sithor in Kompong Cam province in a way that clearly shows, the paper argues, that the new platform for reconstructing Khmer Buddhism was the Vajrayāna.<sup>1</sup>

Ancient Cambodia's Buddhism as seen as Mahāyānist, and Francois Bizot is among a minority calling it a 'Mahāyāna tantrisant'.<sup>2</sup> This paper argues that the Wāt Sithor inscription supports neither the consensus nor the minority view but calls for a different interpretation. The inscription is seen as throwing a precious and unusually clear epigraphic light on the Buddhism re-introduced under Rājendravarman and it is suggested that the guiding spirit of Cambodian Buddhism from 950 to 1250 CE took the tantric form of the Vajrayāna.

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<sup>1</sup> The Wat Sithor inscription praises Jayavarman V (r. 968-1001) as the ruling monarch, but refers back to an extensive period during which Kīrtipaṇḍita sent abroad for texts of Buddhism and returned to propagate them, with wealth amassed through royal and other patronage, through building a network of monasteries and sanctuaries across the country. Although we do not have more specific dates for Kīrtipaṇḍita, it seems reasonable to extrapolate from this that he could have been active from the beginning of the Buddhist revival and the dedication of the first Buddhist temple called Bāt Čum.

<sup>2</sup> François Bizot (1993:25) *Le bouddhisme des Thaïs* EFEO Bangkok

Vajrayāna, Buddhism's third great vehicle, was making its second, successful entry to Tibet at the same time as Buddhism was being revived in Cambodia. It had already mushroomed out of the northern Indian monastery-universities of Nālandā and Vikramaśīla to directly engage the rulers of Sri Lanka, Śrīvijaya, China and Japan in the power of the Tantras.<sup>3</sup> For, although Vajrayāna was based on secret transmissions between master and pupil, it retained the cosmological Bodhisattva ideal of engagement on behalf of all sentient beings from the earlier Mahāyāna, and the doctrines and rituals were energetically and purposefully disseminated.<sup>4</sup> The international backdrop of successive major expansions of tantric Buddhism in the 8<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries is sufficiently interesting circumstantial evidence for keeping open the question of whether the Buddhist Tantras also arrived in the mid-10<sup>th</sup> century in Angkor, then the capital of the most powerful empire in Indochina.

In fact, the Wāt Sithor inscription explicitly states that the Tantras reached Cambodia. But the scholarly community has not been alerted to this because the mention of the Tantras in the inscription was obscured by the French translation of the Sanskrit – a shadow that can now be lifted.

### **Wāt Sithor**

The Wāt Sithor inscription, which dates to the reign of Jayavarman V, who succeeded his father Rājendravarman in 968, was first recorded in modern times in 1882 by L. de Lajonquière and paraphrased in 1883 by E.

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<sup>3</sup> This was the first widely-influential wave of the Vajrayāna, presided over by a pantheon led by Vairocana and Vajrapāni-Trailokyavijaya in the 8<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> centuries. A second wave, from the 11<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, and featuring the cult of Hevajra and Heruka and later Kālacakra is described in the following way by Rob Linrothe: 'The timing of the spread of Hevajra is worth noting. Surviving images from eastern India date to the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Khmer and Thai examples are nearly coeval, dating from the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. Tibetan images survive from at least the 13<sup>th</sup> to the present... It appears that despite the earlier origin of the texts and the ideas behind the Hevajra imagery, they were not influential enough to generate a lasting impact until the late 11<sup>th</sup> or early 12<sup>th</sup> century. By that time, however, the ideas and images quickly flowed in eastern, southern and northern directions. Islam alone proved an impenetrable barrier.' (R. Linrothe 1999:274 *Ruthless compassion* Serindia, London) Ronald Davidson (2002:115) *Indian Esoteric Buddhism* underlines the prominence of the Tantric Buddhists in the Tang court under the Tai-tsung emperor (762-779) and of the Shingon sect in Japan and concludes: 'There appears no exception to the rule that, when the Mantrayāna becomes culturally important outside India, it is principally through the agency of official patronage, either aristocratic or imperial.'

<sup>4</sup> 'But in spite of this tendency towards the recondite, Tantric Buddhism retained from the older Mahāyāna schools the reverence for the bodhisattva ideal: the aim was to bring about universal salvation through compassion. This is its teachings, like those of the other Mahāyāna schools, were spread abroad; this is why these new teachings were brought to China in the seventh and eighth centuries by dedicated Indian masters who vigorously propagated them and who established the school which became dominant at the Tang court during the mid-eighth century as the Chen-yen ('True word' or 'Dhāranī') school.' Raffaello Orlando (1981:2) *A study of Chinese documents concerning the life of the tantric Buddhist patriarch Amoghavajra (CE 705-774)* Princeton

Sénart. George Cœdès, the epigraphist and scholar who made the most sustained contribution to our collective understanding of the ancient Khmers, translated the text in 1942. He published slight modifications in 1954 after studying the stampings from the Wât Sithor stone in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris.<sup>5</sup> Cœdès published the Romanized Sanskrit of the crucial stanza which establishes the presence of the Tantras in Cambodia as:

B7-8 lakṣaṅgrāṭham abhiprajñam yo nveṣya pararāṣṭrataḥ  
tattvasaṅgrahaṭīkādi- tantrañ cādhyāpayad yamī //

and translated it as:

Ayant recherché en pays étranger une foule de livres philosophiques et les traités tels que le commentaire du Tattvasaṅgraha, ce sage en répandit l'étude.  
[Having searched in a foreign country for a great number of philosophical books and treatises, such as the Tattvasaṅgraha commentary, this sage then spread the study of them].

Whereas a more literal translation gives:

Having searched in a foreign kingdom for one hundred thousand<sup>6</sup> book(s) of higher wisdom, and the *tattvasaṅgraha-ṭīkā* and the Tantra(s), the self-restrained one [sage] taught (them).<sup>7</sup>

The root of the word 'Tantra' is: *loom, warp or thread* and it can be used to describe chapters in texts and Cœdès translates the word 'Tantra(s)' in the broad sense of 'traités' (treatises). Having rendered *abhiprajñam* ('higher wisdom') as 'philosophiques', he goes on to define the doctrinal basis of śloka B27-28 as typical of 'le Mayāhāna'<sup>8</sup>:

B27-8 advayānuttaram yānam anyeṣām svam ivārjjayan  
yo diśan munaye haimam rājataṃ śivikādvayam //

Procuring for others as if for himself the nondual (advaya) and supreme (anuttara) vehicle (yāna), he bestowed on the Sage (muni) a pair of golden and silver palanquins (śivikā).

[Cœdès: Procurant aux autres, comme à lui-même le véhicule suprême et sans second, il consacra au Muni deux litières en or et d'argent].

<sup>5</sup> Cœdès, G. (1954:195-211) *Inscriptions du Cambodge* VI EFEO Paris

<sup>6</sup> *Lakṣa* or 100,000 was conventionally used for large indistinct numbers. In the Chinese canon, for example, the *STTS* and the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtras* are all said to have consisted of 100,000 gāthās or ślokas of 32 syllables (Kwon 2002:27).

<sup>7</sup> This is from a new selective translation of the Wât Sithor inscription, published for the first time at the end of this paper, for which I am beholden to Dr Tadeusz Skorupski, Reader in the Study of Religions, SOAS.

<sup>8</sup> Footnote (3) p.206 IC VI.

Cœdès' evaluation of this Buddhism has naturally been influential and his translation has gone unchallenged for many decades. Yet the words of the opening Sanskrit compound *advaya-anuttara-yāna* (nondual-supreme-vehicle) of this stanza clearly suggest the third Buddhist vehicle, the Vajrayāna, rather than the much broader and older term 'Mahāyāna' that the later vehicle enormously enhanced in terms of ritual, liturgy and text over many centuries. Furthermore, close scrutiny of the Wāt Sithor text indicates that Kīrtipaṇḍita, who practised meditation yoga four times daily, concluding each with a sealing *mudrā* (A45-6), had a preference for the mature group of Yoga class Tantras.<sup>9</sup> The aim of such intense yogic engagement was to turn the sādḥaka's whole life into a meditative ritual, so that the visualisations of deity yoga become deeply internalised, beyond conceptual thought, and the presence of the adept's personal deity is felt constantly within the body.<sup>10</sup>

Cœdès left no footnote on the *tīkā* or traditional scholarly commentary, which the inscription says was imported with the Tantras. Some 50 years later, the eminent Sanskritist Kamaleswar Bhattacharya, who worked for many years in Paris with Cœdès, returned to the inscription and agreed that Kīrtipaṇḍita brought in 'two classical texts of Buddhism'. But Bhattacharya went on to add the most valuable post-Cœdès contribution to the study of this inscription. He said that apart from these classics, the rest of the imported works were unidentifiable from the inscription, though apparently 'tantric.'

Apart from the two classic texts of Buddhism, the inscription of Kīrtipaṇḍita at Wāt Sithor mentions texts that have not yet been identified. They are, it seems, 'tantric' texts. In any case, in accordance with the tendency of his time, the pure doctrines Kīrtipaṇḍita professed of negation of the self (*nairātmya*) and 'nothing-but-thought' (*cittamātra*), fitted in very well with 'tantric' ritual, mixed as it is with Hinduism. Among other things, it should be noted that the

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<sup>9</sup> In this preference for the Yoga Tantras, Kīrtipaṇḍita was following in the footsteps of China's great Buddhist sage Amoghavajra, who is counted by Japan's Shingon sect as the sixth patriarch of Sino-Japanese esoteric Buddhism. Amoghavajra was born in India or Sri Lanka and followed his guru Vajrabodhi to China. After Vajrabodhi's death he left China to acquire a copy of the *STTS* in Sri Lanka and subsequently translated it into Chinese in the late eighth century for the Tang emperor.

Amoghavajra said in his final testament: 'The great doctrine, in its totality and in its particulars, is vast and deep! Who can fathom the source of the Yoga-tantra?' Orlando comments on this: 'The term in its most particular sense refers to the Yoga-tantra, the esoteric texts regarding the Vajradhatu or "Diamond Realm"... In a more general sense, the term *yoga* in Esoteric Buddhism means "to concentrate one's mind in order to harmonize with the supreme doctrine and to identify with the deity one worships." Hence all the rites performed by the monks in this sect, whether simple or complicated, are called *yoga*, because these rites are the means to identify oneself with the deity...' Orlando (1981:106)

<sup>10</sup> See English (2002:31-3)

inscription of Wāt Sithor mentions ‘formulas’ (*mantra*) and ‘gestures’ (*mudrā*), the thunderbolt and the bell (*ghaṇṭā*).<sup>11</sup>

In the stanza preceding the one about Kīrtipaṇḍita’s trip abroad, the Mahāyāna classic *madhyāntavibhāga* (‘Discerning the Middle from the extremes’) by ‘Maitreya-nātha’ is mentioned. This is usually taken to be written by Asanga, the fourth century founder of the Yogācāra school.<sup>12</sup> However the mention of the idealist ‘nothing-but-thought’ (*cittamātra*) philosophy earlier in the passage is a reference to a slightly earlier phase of Mahāyāna thinking, seen in works like the *lankāvatāra-sūtra*, which suggests the passage is referring back generally to Mahāyāna doctrines rather than associating Kīrtipaṇḍita with a specific school.<sup>13</sup>

Bhattacharya, though he acknowledges the correct title *Tattvasamgraha-tīkā*,<sup>14</sup> like Cœdès appears to take the second ‘classic’ to be the commentary on Śāntaraksita’s late eighth century compendium of Mahāyāna doctrines written by his famous pupil Kamalaśīla.<sup>15</sup> David Snellgrove also reads Wāt Sithor as referring to Kamalaśīla’s commentary<sup>16</sup>; so does Jean Boisselier.<sup>17</sup> Cœdès no doubt thought an old-style Mahāyāna was entering Cambodia because of this combination of Asanga’s *Madhyāntavibhāga* and Kamalaśīla’s commentary on

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<sup>11</sup> This is my translation of : ‘Outre deux textes classiques de bouddhisme, l’inscription de Kīrtipaṇḍita à Vat Sithor mentionne des textes qui n’ont pas pu être encore identifiés. Il s’agit, semble-t-il, de textes « tantriques ». En tout cas, selon la tendance de l’époque, les pures doctrines de la négation de soi (*nairātmyā*) et du « rien-que-pensée » (*cittamātra*), que professait le maître Kīrtipaṇḍita, s’accommodaient fort bien du rituel ‘tantrique’, mêlé d’hindouisme. À noter, entre autres, dans l’inscription de Vat Sithor, la mention de « formules » (*mantra*) et de « gestes » (*mudrā*), du foudre (*vajra*) et de la clochette (*ghaṇṭā*).’ Bhattacharya K. (1997:45) ‘Les religions du Cambodge ancien et l’épigraphie sanskrite’ in *Angkor et dix siècles d’art khmer* eds. Jessop and Zephir, Edition de la Réunion des Musées Nationaux, Paris

<sup>12</sup> Williams, Paul (1989:81) *Mahayana Buddhism* Routledge, London

<sup>13</sup> The Yogācāra school held an idealist doctrine of *viññāptimātra* (‘nothing-but-perception’) which, according to Suzuki took them from ‘idealistic realism’ to ‘pure idealism.’ ‘Further, the Yogācāra upholds the theory of *viññāptimātra* and not that of *cittamātra*, which belongs to the *Lankā*... The difference is this: according to the *viññāptimātra*, the world is nothing but ideas, there are no realities behind them; but the *cittamātra* states that there is nothing but Citta, Mind, in the world and that the world is the objectification of Mind. The one is pure idealism and the other idealistic realism.’ Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki (1932:xl) *The Lankavatara Sūtra, a Mahāyāna text translated for the first time from the original Sanskrit* Routledge, London.

<sup>14</sup> ‘Les textes de notre inscription cite – le *Madhyavibhāga-śāstra* et la *Tattvasamgraha-tīkā* – appartiennent à cette école.’ Bhattacharya, K. (1961:34) *Les religions brahmaniques dans l’ancien Cambodge d’après l’épigraphie et l’iconographie* PEFEO, Paris

<sup>15</sup> Śāntaraksita was the high priest of Nālandā when the *STTS* was at its apogee there in the late 8<sup>th</sup> century (Krishnamacharya, Embar (1926:6) *Tattvasamgraha of Śāntaraksita with Commentary by Kamalaśīla* Central Library, Calcutta); Kamalaśīla was Professor of Tantras in Nālandā before moving to Tibet (see Vidyābhūšana, Satis Chandra (1920:327) *A History of Indian Logic* Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi/Patna).

<sup>16</sup> Snellgrove 2001:147n45 *Khmer civilization and Angkor* Orchid press, Bangkok).

<sup>17</sup> ‘On a déjà souligné que le commentaire cité était l’oeuvre d’un Vijnānavadin du VIII<sup>e</sup> siècle, qui contribua, entre autres, à la réforme du bouddhisme tibétain...’ Jean Boisselier (1992:259) ‘Rôle du nord-est dans la renaissance du Buddhism khmer du X<sup>ieme</sup> siècle’ in *Studies on historic cities in lower northeast Thailand CE 8th – 13th centuries* Sophia University, Tokyo

Śāntaraksita's compendium. But we should note that Śāntaraksita and Kamalaśīla were in fact tantric masters from Nālandā, the north Indian monastery that was then the world centre of a rapidly expanding Buddhist Tantrism, who both played key roles in bringing *tantric* Buddhism to Tibet.<sup>18</sup> Bhattacharya is of course aware of this, as well as the fact that Yogācāra *doctrines* were adopted wholesale by the later followers of Vajrayāna,<sup>19</sup> who focused their own, later innovations on rituals, mantras and the acquisition of supernatural powers, rather than further refinement of doctrine. And Bhattacharya goes on to assume that Kīrtipaṇḍita, who uses *mantra*, *mudrā*, *vajra* and *ghaṇṭā*, was a tantric Buddhist in tune with the 10<sup>th</sup> century trends of northern Buddhism. Part of the confusion about the kind of Buddhism Kīrtipaṇḍita brought to Cambodia arises from the fact that the short name 'Tattvasaṃgraha' used to identify one of the texts named in the inscription can refer to more than one text, and everyone seems to have picked the wrong one.

### Pañjikā or tīkā

Three major works are known by the short name *Tattvasaṃgraha* 'compendium of truth'. Kamalaśīla's commentary is called the *Tattvasaṃgraha-pañjikā*, but the commentary brought in by Kīrtipaṇḍita, according to the Wāt Sithor stone, was the '*Tattvasaṃgraha-tīkā*', a very different work. Asian scholars have identified the *Tattvasaṃgraha-tīkā* as the short name for the *Kosalālamkāra-tattvasaṃgraha-tīkā*,<sup>20</sup> which is not a commentary on Śāntaraksita's manual of Mahāyāna doctrines but a leading commentary on the *Tattvasaṃgraha-tantra* itself.<sup>21</sup> The Tantra is the third work which shares the same short name. The author of the *tīkā*,

<sup>18</sup> Śāntaraksita's compendium of doctrines and Kamalaśīla's defence of them won the Lhasa debate in the Tibetan court before king Khri-srong-lde-bstan (r. 755-797) and gave Indian Tantric Buddhism access to Tibet, excluding the then current Chinese variety represented by the sage Mahāyāna Hoshang.

<sup>19</sup> Étienne Lamotte made the following classical statement for seeing the two major streams of Mahāyāna doctrine, the earlier Mādhyamika and the later Yogācāra, converging in the notion of the Ādi-Buddha Vajrasattva of Vajrayāna:

'Les Vajrayānistes, dont les porte-paroles principaux furent Śubhakarasiṃha (637-735), Vajrabodhi (671-741) et Amoghavajra (705-774), ramènent à l'unité la Śūnyatā des Mādhyamika et la Cittamātratā des Yogācāra en postulant un Vajra-sattva "Diamant-Essence" qui les combine étroitement:

"Par *Vajra* on entend la Śūnyatā; par *Sattva*, le Savoir sans plus; leur identité résulte de la nature même du *Vajra-sattva*."

vajreṇa śūnyatā proktā sattvena jñānamātratā,  
tādāmyam anayoh siddham vajrasattvasvabhāvataḥ.

(*Advayavajrasaṃgraha* dans S.B. Dasgupta 1950:87n2 *An Introduction to Tantric Buddhism* Calcutta). Lamotte, Étienne (1966:150) 'Vajrapani en Inde' in *Mélanges de sinologie offerts à M. Paul Demiéville* PUF Paris.

<sup>20</sup> Mkhas-grub-rje, *Rgyud-sde-spyi'i-rnam-par-gzhag-pa-rgyas-par-brjod* translated by F.D. Lessing and A. Wayman (1968:25) as *Introduction to the Buddhist Tantric Systems*, The Hague; Do-Kyun Kwon (2002:25) *STTS a study of its origin, structure and teachings* PhD thesis, SOAS, who also cites Matsūnaga Yukei's *Mikkyō Rekishi* p. 68

<sup>21</sup> The Tantra's full name is *Sarva-tathāgata-tattva-saṃgraha-nāma-mahāyāna-sūtra* (*STTS*)

which is extant only in its Tibetan translation,<sup>22</sup> was the later of two Śākyamitras identified by Tibet's 16<sup>th</sup> century historian Lama Tāranātha. The second Śākyamitra probably lived in the late 9<sup>th</sup> century<sup>23</sup> and, according to Tāranātha, composed the *Kosalālamkāra-tattvasamgraha-tīkā* in his home town of Kosala during the reign of Indian king Devapāla, the successor of Gopāla, founder of the Pāla dynasty.<sup>24</sup> In Kīrtipaṇḍita's time, Śākyamitra's *tīkā* was a major work of recent scholarship – indeed the current classic – on the Tantra which had played the pre-eminent role in advancing the spread of Vajrayāna in South Asia, East Asia and Southeast Asia.

The upshot of this small clarification is significant. It means that the inscription's Sanskrit compound '*tattvasaṅgrahatīkādi-tantraṅ*' identifies the root Tantra of the Yoga class (in the Tibetan classification) and its major commentary as the central textual platform for the Khmer Buddhist revival. In Kīrtipaṇḍita's day, these were leading international Vajrayāna classics and his taking the *Tattvasamgraha-tantra* and Śākyamitra's *tīkā* into Cambodia to re-launch Buddhism is a very different proposition from taking in the rather dry, detailed, historical textbooks of Mahāyānist doctrines written by Śāntaraksita and Kamalaśīla.

Moreover, the classical model of international behaviour in the minds of ambitious 10<sup>th</sup> century Buddhists in touch with international Buddhist currents was probably still the extraordinary eighth century careers of the Indian monks Vajrabodhi and Amoghavajra, who took esoteric Buddhism to China and became immensely influential advisors to three Tang emperors – indeed they were China's first mandarins.<sup>25</sup> The Wāt Sithor inscription, when it mentions Kīrtipaṇḍita's foreign expedition for tantric texts, may even be referring, in background mode, to the great Buddhist tradition of gifted Chinese pilgrims and Indian gurus who undertook hazardous journeys to India and from India to bring the Buddhist Sūtras and Tantras to China. For Kīrtipaṇḍita, in his mission to propagate Buddhism in Cambodia, must have been familiar with the phenomenal success of Vajrabodhi and Amoghavajra in creating 'state protection'

<sup>22</sup> The mid-9<sup>th</sup> century Tibetan translation is by Dharmasrībhadrā and Rin-chen-bzang-po (TTP. No. 3326, Vol. 70 pp.190-305 & Vol. 71 pp.2-94-2-6)

<sup>23</sup> Kwon 2002:25; Winternitz, M. (1932:396) *A History of Indian Literature* University of Calcutta La Vallée Poussin agrees the mid-ninth century date and notes Śākyamitra appears to have added a (signed) chapter to the *Pañcakrama* attributed to Nāgārjuna. Louis de la Vallée Poussin (1896:IX) *Études et textes tantriques Pañcakrama* Engelcke, Gand

<sup>24</sup> Tāranātha (1608:274-83) *History of Buddhism in India*

<sup>25</sup> Michel Strickmann notes 'mandarin' has the same Sanskrit root as mantra or mantrin ('possessor of mantras'): '..."mandarin" originally meant *mantrin*, councillor or the king in possession of powerful *mantra*.' Strickmann, Michel (1996:10) *Mantras et mandarins: le bouddhisme tantrique en Chine* Gallimard, Paris

esoteric Buddhism in China on the basis of their translations of the Tantras they imported from India and Sri Lanka:

Having searched in a foreign kingdom for one hundred thousand book(s) of higher wisdom, firstly the *Tattvasamgraha-tīkā* and the Tantra(s), the self-restrained one [sage] taught (them).

The international outlook of the medieval Buddhists should not be underestimated<sup>26</sup> and Amoghavajra's life was an exemplar of the kind of proselytising, court-supported, international Buddhism that was the model of Kīrtipaṇḍita.<sup>27</sup> To Amoghavajra and his master, who devoted their lives to translating the Tantras into Chinese, Buddhist texts were objects of veneration in their own right.<sup>28</sup> Vajrabodhi's final act before his death was to walk seven times around an image of Vairocana while paying 'homage to the Sanskrit texts.'<sup>29</sup> Amoghavajra appears to have been born in mainly Zoroastrian Samarkand and converted to Buddhism in Sri Lanka, possibly on a business trip with his merchant uncle. He met his guru Vajrabodhi shortly afterwards in Java when he was 14 and they sailed to China where they translated Tantras into Chinese for the Tang emperors for 20 years. Vajrabodhi's official Tang biography (*hsing-chuang*, 'account of conduct') says simply '...he came to the capital and was untiring in his propagation of the [doctrine] of the Esoteric Scriptures and in the erection of properly constructed mandalas.'<sup>30</sup> Amoghavajra, in the last testament he wrote just before he died 33 years after his guru, describes how he again set sail after Vajrabodhi's death to gather more

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<sup>26</sup> Giuseppe Tucci characterises the new internationalism of the medieval world as essential to the emergence and spread of the Tantras: 'The Tantras may in fact be best defined as the expression of Indian gnosis, slowly elaborated, by a spontaneous ripening of indigenous currents of thought and under occasional influences from outside, in one of those periods when the ups and downs of history and commercial relations brought India closer to the Roman-Hellenistic, Iranian and Chinese civilizations. This process is slow and unfolds through those centuries which saw deep changes in the ancient religions and philosophies; foreign ideas planted the seeds of new urges and doubts, the development of vast empires united people, hitherto isolated and hostile...the beliefs of barbarians and primitive populations were investigated with keen curiosity.' (1949:210) *Tibetan painted scrolls* La Libreria dello Stato, Roma

<sup>27</sup> Amoghavajra's eighth century biography says when he arrived to a royal welcome in Sri Lanka, following the death of his master Vajrabodhi in 741: 'He sought everywhere for the scriptures of the Esoteric Sect and [obtained] more than five hundred sūtras and commentaries. There was nothing he did not go into thoroughly, as, for example, the samaya (attribute), the various deities' secret mudrās, forms, colors, arrangements of altars, banners, and the literal and intrinsic meanings of the texts.' Chou Yi-liang (1945:291) 'Tantrism in China' *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 8 Cambridge Mass.

<sup>28</sup> In his final testament, Amoghavajra seems indifferent to the vast storehouses of wealth he accumulated from imperial patronage, but his wishes concerning the Tantras he brought from abroad and translated are expressed forcefully: 'On behalf of the empire, you [monks] must incessantly pray [for these scriptures], recite sūtras and offer incense [for them], and venerate and protect them. They must not be lost or scattered. I have asked the Emperor to build a pavilion in which to put [the statue of] Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva downstairs, and to put Chinese and Sanskrit texts for safekeeping upstairs, in eternal veneration for the state as field of merit.' *The Testament of Amoghavajra* translated by Orlando 1981:125

<sup>29</sup> Chou 1945:283

<sup>30</sup> Chou (1945:280)



Tantras in Sri Lanka, while visiting the Buddhist communities in 20 countries along the maritime trade route between China and India.<sup>31</sup> Only after personally experiencing the status and scholarship of the world's major Buddhist communities did this brilliant man of humble manner return to China to build a position of exceptional influence as the guru of three emperors.<sup>32</sup> Although Vajrabodhi had begun translating the *Tattvasaṃgraha-tantra* into Chinese in 723, and Amoghavajra completed the first part of five chapters in 753, the continuing importance of the *STTS* at the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> century is signalled in the fact that the entire 26 chapters were at that time being translated into Chinese and re-translated into Tibetan.<sup>33</sup> The new Khmer Buddhism would be shaped around the initiations, consecrations and mandalas described in this Tantra – the most powerful of them conducted in secret – and held to be capable of both propelling humans to Buddhahood in one lifetime, and of conferring supernatural powers on worldly rulers building and defending their states.

### **The Tantra**

The full name of the Tantra most favoured by Vajrabodhi, Amoghavajra and Kīrtipaṇḍita is *Sarva-tathāgata-tattva-saṃgraha-nāma-mahāyāna-sūtra (STTS)*, translated as the *Mahāyāna Sūtra called the Compendium of Truth of all the Tathāgatas*. It amounts to an in-depth exposition of a large number of meditation exercises and rituals based on 28 mandalas. It includes descriptions of the 37 deities grouped in *kula* or families around Vairocana and the four directional Buddhas in the pre-eminent and most potent *Vajradhatu Mahāmandala*.<sup>34</sup> The *STTS* also dramatically recounts one of the most popular stories of tantric Buddhism – frequently carved in temple narratives – namely the stirring account of Vajrapāṇi's battle with Śiva using arsenals of magical weapons. Śiva and Vajrapāṇi, in his wrathful *Trailokyavijaya* or 'conqueror of the three worlds' form, trade

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<sup>31</sup> Orlando 1981:108.

<sup>32</sup> Amoghavajra, in his will, assigned his large holdings of land to the monasteries and refused even a simple grave for himself: 'You should not waste money on a great and elaborate funeral ceremony, nor should you build a grave and only waste human effort. Just take a bed and carry me to the outskirts of the city; cremate my body according to the Buddhist Law; then take out the ashes and use them in rituals, and then immediately scatter them. You certainly must not set up a funeral plaque with my picture on it.' Orlando 1981:128

<sup>33</sup> The Chinese version by Dānapāla was completed between 1012 and 1015 and the new Tibetan version by Rinchen Zangpo and Śraddhakāravarma appeared at about the same time. (Linrothe 1999:155)

<sup>34</sup> Certain stone sculptures from the late 12<sup>th</sup> century suggest a companion Tantra to the *STTS* may also have been brought to Cambodia. The *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana-tantra (SDPS)* also has principal mandalas with 37 deities and features Vairocana at the centre of some of them, with Vajrapāṇi acting as master of ceremonies. The Eight Great Nāga mandala from the *SDPS* appears to be carved into a lintel of the Tà Prohm temple.

insults and intimidating displays in a dramatisation of doctrinal rivalries until Vajrapāṇi defeats the universal Hindu god and brings him into the Vajradhatu mandala as the Tathāgata bhasmeśvara-nirghosa (‘Buddha soundless lord of ashes’). In the 9<sup>th</sup> century this Tantra established Trailokyavijaya as the principal deity of international tantric Buddhism.<sup>35</sup>

The *STTS* text was known only in Chinese and Tibetan translations until Lokesh Chandra and David Snellgrove in 1981 published a facsimile reproduction of a 10<sup>th</sup> century Nepalese bamboo MS written in Devanāgarī script in the Nepalese National Archive. The full title of the Tantra includes the potentially misleading tag *mahāyāna sūtra*. The etymology of Sūtra is also ‘thread’ or ‘continuous line’ but over the centuries in which the Vajrayāna emerged out of the Mahāyāna as a distinct later vehicle of Buddhism, ‘Sūtra’ and ‘Tantra’ became markers that delineated the new vehicle from the old. The Yoga Tantras absorb the doctrines of the Mādhyamika and Yogācāra from the earlier Mahāyāna and focus on ritual, liturgy and direct experiences through yoga.<sup>36</sup> The Vajrayāna from the outset moved away from, but did not abandon, the doctrinal complexity and hair-splitting logic of the early Mahāyāna. In the seventh century, when the new vehicle was first being fashioned by the masters of Nālandā, this monastery remained the main centre of the Yogācāra school.<sup>37</sup> Rather than attempting further refinements to the epistemology of the Mādhyamikas or the Vijnānavādins of the Yogācāra, it focused on rituals, spells and yogic exercises as practical techniques for achieving Buddhahood rapidly, rather than through hundreds of consecutive lives over thousands of years, as in the early Mahāyāna. Kwon says the retention of the Mahāyāna sūtra title and was designed ‘to present their doctrine as an expanded form of Mahāyāna Buddhism and as having the same authority as Mahāyāna Buddhism.’<sup>38</sup> This tradition of esteem for the philosophical base of the Mahāyāna appears in the Wāt

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<sup>35</sup> Linrothe 1999:178

<sup>36</sup> Tucci says the masters of the Vajrayāna considered doctrine secondary: ‘This is not the place for details on Vajrayāna dogmatics, which are extremely difficult because they are based, above all, on direct experiences and immediate realizations, and do not lay great store by doctrinal speculations. The latter are borrowed from the various Mahāyāna schools, either Mādhyamika or Yogācāra; they represent the premises from which the Vajrayāna masters started and upon which they built the psychological subtleties of their liturgies and of their yoga practices.’ (Tucci 1949:233)

Dutch scholars point to the same Yogācāra doctrinal base in the Javanese Vajrayāna. Bernet Kempers cites Krom with approval: ‘The Javanese Mahāyāna, from the Çailendras, who erected Kalasan, to the downfall of the Majapahit, is one and the same thing; it is the Yogācāra creed imbued with the spirit of Tantrism.’ Bernet Kempers A.J. (1933:4) *The bronzes of Nālandā and Hindu-Javanese art* E.J. Brill, Leiden. See also Dasgupta, Shashi Bhusan (1950:1) *An introduction to tantric Buddhism* University of Calcutta

<sup>37</sup> Orlando 1981:8

<sup>38</sup> Kwon 2002:32

Sithor inscription, where Kīrtipaṇḍita is said to be a brilliant exponent of both the Madyāmika and Yogācāra:

B3-4 In him the sun of the *nairātmya*, *cittamātra* and other doctrines (*darśana*), eclipsed by the night of erroneous views (*mithyādr̥ṣṭi*), shone stronger than the day.

Both Sūtras and Tantras are compiled in a literary convention that implies the direct recording of the preaching and dialogues of Śākyamuni or other Buddhas. Both are written as *buddhavacana* ‘Buddha words’ – as though they were recorded on the spot by unnamed listeners. So the *STTS*, like the Sūtras, begins with ‘*evam mayā śrutam ...*’ (‘Thus have I heard...’) and concludes with ‘*...idam avocato bhagavān*’ (‘...the Lord enunciated these words’). But between the Sūtras and the Tantras there is a dramatic change of scene. Whereas Sūtras take the form of orations and dialogues between the historical Buddha and his followers at named sites in northern India, the Tantras describe proclamations, initiations, discussions and dramas unfolding before uncountable celestial hosts of Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and gods. In Snellgrove’s words:

In the *Tattvasaṃgraha-tantra* the standard Mahāyāna formula of Śākyamuni preaching to monks and bodhisattvas on a mountain in Bihar, is replaced by the fifth universal Buddha Mahāvairocana preaching in his vast celestial paradise before a myriad Bodhisattvas and other heavenly beings.<sup>39</sup>

The recorder and dramatised listener in the enacted verbal interactions is no longer a disciple of the Buddha. Japanese 17<sup>th</sup> century commentator Donjaku identifies the ‘I’ of the *STTS* as the Bodhisattva Vajrapāṇi and sees the interaction as a kind of transcendental heuristic monologue:

Mahāvairocana is the main speaker and Vajrapāṇi the listener. Since Vairocana is Vajrapāṇi, Vajrapāṇi’s listening means Mahāvairocana listening to himself.<sup>40</sup>

The cosmic location with a celestial Bodhisattva as ‘I’ discoursing with a transcendent Adi-Buddha provides the setting for the Vajrayāna’s version of how ultimate enlightenment is achieved, but also points towards the crucial application in human, political empowerment that attracted so many worldly rulers. The *STTS* opens with Śākyamuni under the bodhi tree in Bodhgayā prior to achieving his ultimate transformation. Śākyamitra holds that Śākyamuni’s maturation or illusory body (*vipāka-kāya*) remained on the bank of the Nairāñjanā River, while his mental body (*manomaya-kāya*) ascended to the Akaniṣṭha heaven.<sup>41</sup> The Tantra

<sup>39</sup> Snellgrove, D (1981:15) ‘Introduction’ to *Sarva-tathāgata-tattva-saṅgraha: Facsimile reproduction of a Tenth Century Sanskrit Manuscript from Nepal* edited by Lokesh Chandra and David L. Snellgrove, New Dehli

<sup>40</sup> TSD Vol. 61 No. 2225 pp.125-6 cited in Kwon 2002:42

<sup>41</sup> Mkhas-grub-rje’s analysis in Lessing and Wayman 1968:27-9.

describes how Śākyamuni is instructed by Vairocana and the celestial host of *tathāgatas* on how to achieve the *pañca abhisambodhi* – the five ultimate ‘enlightenment-revelation’ stages to becoming a perfectly enlightened Buddha in the *sambhoga-kāya* of Mahāvairocana. Having achieved the steps, the Buddha then proceeds to the summit of Mount Sumeru and pronounces the *STTS*, before returning to his earthly body to *simulate* his celestial achievement under the bodhi tree, in a way humans would find easier to comprehend. This enactment of the achievement of the five ‘revelation-enlightenment’ stages discloses the Vajrayāna’s ritual framework for achieving Buddhahood in one lifetime. The ultimate goal of Yoga Tantra, as defined in the *STTS*, is attaining perfect enlightenment by experiencing precisely these five Wisdoms of Vairocana. The Tantra elaborates a method of meditational visualisation of large numbers of related transcendent deities in mandalas, that is reinforced with uttering magical formulas (mantras) and sealing each ritual with prescribed and hand positions or mudrās. This method of bringing the transcendent Buddhas into direct, yogic contact with a kind of astral body within the physical body – nourishing the growth of the Buddhas of the macrocosm within the human microcosm – is seen as the key to transformation of the individual into a transcendent state. Although participants are pledged to secrecy about the most important rituals, the *STTS* gives a fairly explicit account of how transcendent deities can be invoked to manifest themselves in ‘exceedingly splendid mandala’. Outside the monastery the explicit descriptions of rituals opens the way to exoteric ceremonies of state in the political arena, in which a king may be transformed into a cakravartin or universal ruler.

Apart from the specific mention of the Tantra and its widely respected *tīkā* in the Wāt Sithor inscription, there is other evidence from the 10<sup>th</sup> century which points to Kīrtipaṇḍita’s Buddhism as belonging to the Vajrayāna. There is epigraphic evidence of ritual interactions with the Buddhas, as well as the iconic evidence from the temples where they were enacted. First, the rituals.

### **The rituals**

Wāt Sithor indicates some of the Buddhist doctrines and ritual techniques taught in the foundations established by Kīrtipaṇḍita. It also alludes to some Vedic and Śaiva rituals adopted by the Vajrayāna, which would no

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Another commentator, Ānandagarbha, interprets the text as implying that the Buddha had achieved enlightenment in time immemorial and merely projected an illusory body as Śākyamuni to live out that Buddha’s life on earth. See Tucci, Giuseppe (1949:221) *Tibetan Painted Scrolls* La Libreria dello Stato, Roma.

doubt have eased the accommodation of Buddhism with Cambodia's long Brahmanical past. Kamaleswar Bhattacharya draws attention to this, as mentioned earlier:

En tout cas, selon la tendance de l'époque, les pures doctrines de la négation de soi (*nairātmya*) et du 'rien-que-pensée' (*cittamātra*), que professait le maître Kīrtipaṇḍita, s'accommodaient fort bien du rituel 'tantrique', mêlé d'hindouisme. À noter, entre autres, dans l'inscription de Vat Sithor, la mention de « formules » (*mantra*) et de « gestes » (*mudrā*), du foudre (*vajra*) et de la clochette (*ghaṇṭā*).<sup>42</sup>

The inscription shows Kīrtipaṇḍita to be proficient in all 'three m's' that are the stock in trade of tantric Buddhist rituals -- *mandalas*, *mantras* and *mudrās*:

C37-8 The one who is skilled in the quintessences of deities (hr̥ts)<sup>43</sup>, mudrās, mantras, vidyās and the homa rite, and who is knowledgeable in the secret (rahasya) of the vajra and the ghaṇṭā, is a purohita worthy of his fees.

The *vajra* (thunderbolt) and *ghaṇṭā* (bell) are the iconic attributes of many of the principal tantric deities such as Vajrapāṇi, Vajrasattva, Vajradhara, Samvara and Hevajra. As ritual implements they are used by adepts to clear the ritual space of earth spirits and summon the deities to earth, where they are invited to enter the mandala prepared for them. Experiencing the presence of deities and their interaction with the inner self of the participants is held to generate special powers (*siddhi*). Wāt Sithor says people were in awe of Kīrtipaṇḍita's followers:

B11-12 yadīyaśiṣyanāmāpi vādikarṇṇapute patat  
santrāsaṅ janayām āsa mantravat sarppamaṇḍale /

Someone engaged in debate had only to hear it whispered that he was dealing with a pupil of Kīrtipaṇḍita to be seized with fear like a nest of serpents charmed with a mantra.

Kīrtipaṇḍita made special provision for secret initiations and the transmission of 'the secret of the vajra and ghaṇṭā' when setting up *aśrams* for monks and the laity:

B33-4 Having established the outer (bāhya) and secret (guhya) Sad-Dharma, for worship (pūja) he made separate āśrama for his Sangha and guests (atithi).

Esoteric Buddhism was by tradition transmitted in secret from master to pupil. Secrecy was enjoined with dire warnings after the key moments of each consecration, as in the pupil's rite for entry into the *Vajradhatu* mandala in part one section c.2:

<sup>42</sup> Bhattacharya K. (1997:45)

<sup>43</sup> Hr̥ts = hr̥daya: quintessence of deities, like bīja or seed syllables.

I shall generate within you the *vajra*-knowledge...but you should not tell anyone who has not seen the (Vajradhatu) Mahāmandala, otherwise your pledge will fail....

‘This is your pledge-*vajra*. If you divulge it to anyone, it will split open your head.’<sup>44</sup>

‘Seeing’ the mandala here means being initiated into experiencing it with more vividness than the existential world of *samsāra*. The invocation of Buddhas to be manifest in ‘exceedingly splendid mandala’ is the basic visualisation techniques of deity yoga in the Tantras, which entails yogic experiences of *consubstantiating* with visualised deities in an ‘astral’ body deep within the physical body.<sup>45</sup> This technique seems to be indicated where the inscription talks of ‘grasping’ Buddhas in consubstantiation:

A9-10 yathābhūmipraviṣṭanam pṛthakprajñānuvarttinam

dharmmaṃ sāmboḡinirddiṣṭam dhyānagrāhyan namatāmy aham //

I salute the Law that accords with the Wisdoms of the (Buddhas) in their (Buddha)-fields and is proclaimed by the (Buddhas) in their enjoyment bodies which allow them to be grasped in meditation.

Indeed, the grasping of deities is eventually enshrined in the principal mantra of the supreme deity of the mature Vajrayāna, Vajrasattva:

Om! Vajrasattva protect me, Vajrasattva be in attendance on me, stand firm for me, let me grasp you, make superior all my mind; vajra-essence, great pledge, vajra-being Ah!<sup>46</sup>

Among the rituals absorbed by Buddhism from the Vedic culture of ancient India are the *homa* rites or fire rituals just mentioned in line C37-8 as an essential skill of a purohita worthy of his fees. Wāt Sithor records that Kīrtipaṇḍita was appointed to perform at least two, and probably all four, *homa* rites permanently in king Jayavarman V’s palace<sup>47</sup>:

<sup>44</sup> Sanskrit p.80, 11-12 translated by Kwon 2002:77

<sup>45</sup> I take ‘astral’ from Paul Williams (1989:186) *Mahāyāna Buddhism* Routledge, London: ‘In Tantric practice from the beginning – after necessary initiation, for Tantric Buddhism is strictly esoteric – the practitioner tries to see himself as the appropriate Buddha, and the world as a divine, magical realm. Gradually this becomes more real; gradually the meditator brings into play a subtle physiology, a subtle (astral?) body usually dormant or semi-dormant in the gross material body. This subtle body (owing something, I suspect, to ancient Indian medical theories) really becomes a divine body, it is transmuted into that of a Buddha. Gradually also the hold of the gross world of inherently existing separate objects is loosened, and the mediator develops an ability to transform the world, to perform miracles.’

<sup>46</sup> T. Skorupski notes for SOAS Buddhist Forum 18/3/2005.

<sup>47</sup> These are two of the four principal Vedic fire or ‘homa’ rights of kṣānti (śānti), pusti, vaśya (subduing), abhicāra (destruction) which are performed with different shaped hearths, facing a different direction at morning, noon, early evening and dusk. A common Buddhist version of the four, plus a fifth variant, are described in Chou Yi-liang (1945:287n16) ‘Tantrism in China’ *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 8 Cambridge Mass.

B21-2 He was honoured and appointed by the king to perform inside the palace the peaceful (śānti), enriching (puṣṭi) and other rites (karma) in order to protect the territory of the kingdom (rāstra-mandala).

Buddhism was respectful and accepting of ancient rituals and liturgies. In China and Japan elaborate altars and platforms were created for Buddhist homa rites, which were the formal framework for daily *samādhi* ('concentration' = meditation) sessions, which always reserved a space for Agni, the Vedic god of fire.<sup>48</sup> Vedic homa rites are therefore acknowledged in the outer sections of the two major mandalas of Japanese Shingon and Tendai tantric Buddhism. In the Tendai 'Goma' fire rite, the sixth offering is made to 'the spirits of the Vedic religion, Taoism, and Shinto deities, which occupy the outer rims of the Lotus and Vajra mandala.'<sup>49</sup> Many Tantras prescribe the ministering of homa rites.<sup>50</sup> In the context of 10<sup>th</sup> century Cambodia, where Kīrtipaṇḍita gave the *STTS* and Vajrapāṇi special prominence in texts and caityas, the version of the fire rites he practised in the palace would have involved hearths shaped as circles, squares, crescents and triangles, as defined in some detail in the eighth century Yoga class Tantra *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana* ('Tantra for the elimination of all evil destinies') -- a current classic text in Kīrtipaṇḍita's time, which the Khmer guru may also have imported, for there is evidence for it being present in Khmer Buddhism two centuries later.<sup>51</sup> Vajrapāṇi, as in the *STTS*, is the master of ceremonies in this Tantra.<sup>52</sup> Another possible source for Kīrtipaṇḍita is the *kriyāsamgraha* 'Compendium of rituals'<sup>53</sup>, which is dated by Roth to the eighth and ninth centuries<sup>54</sup> and which includes homa rites and rituals for preparing the ground for constructing aśrams or monasteries and for erecting pedestals and restoring images like Kīrtipaṇḍita in the inscription:

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<sup>48</sup> Strickmann, Michel (1996 :342) *Mantras et mandarins: le bouddhisme tantrique en Chine* Gallimard, Paris

<sup>49</sup> Saso, Michael (1991:35) *Homa rites and Mandala Meditation in Tendai Buddhism* Aditya Prakashan, Dehli

<sup>50</sup> Snellgrove says: 'Religious experts, whether monks or non-celibate yogins, are expected to be proficient in what are generally referred to as the "Four Rites" (Sanskrit *catuh karmani*, Tibetan *las bzhi*), namely tranquilizing, prospering, subduing and destroying. Grouped under such headings the appropriate ceremonies are described in the Yoga Tantra *Durgatipariśodhana* ... The practice of making such an offering to the gods was taken up by the Buddhists during the Mahāyāna period, and it was mentioned... in connection with the consecration ceremony as performed according to the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa*. Snellgrove D. (1987:156) *Indo-Tibetan Buddhism* reprint 2004 Orchid Press, Bangkok

<sup>51</sup> A 12<sup>th</sup> century temple lintel appears to represent the Eight Great Nāga mandala defined in the SDPS, suggesting that this famous Tantra was current then in Khmer Buddhism.

<sup>52</sup> Tadeusz Skorupski (1983:68-72) *Sarvadurgatipariśodhanatantra* (62b-65a) Motilal Banarsidass, Dehli

<sup>53</sup> Tadeusz Skorupski *Kriyāsamgraha* Institute of Buddhist Studies, Tring

<sup>54</sup> Gustav Roth (1980:195) 'Symbolism of the Buddhist Stūpa' *The Stūpa, its religious, historical and architectural significance* eds. Anna Libera Dallapiccola, Stephanie Zingel-Avé Lallement, Wiesbaden

B39-40 He re-erected more than 10 images of Vajrin and Lokeśa, which were raised by Śrī Satyavarman on the eastern hill, whose pedestals were damaged.

## **Brahmans**

But how tolerant of Buddhism were the Śaiva courtiers and land-owning Brahmanical aristocracy? Wàt Sithor offers no indication of how the new intrusion of Buddhism into the Brahmanical Khmer empire was received by the Brahmans, who had been entrenching themselves with land, wealth and political power for several centuries, and virtually exclusively since Jayavarman II founded the Śaiva state in 802. But we must assume that the arrival of powerful Buddhists at court and the flow of royal patronage into Buddhist foundations and icons met with some resentment.

Snellgrove reflects thus on the religious-political background:

From this [Wàt Sithor inscription]...one can deduce a few ideas concerning the state of Buddhism in the Khmer empire in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries. Just like the many Brahmanical foundations, it depended on the munificence of wealthy prelates who had won the monarch's or some local ruler's favour. But Buddhism was clearly at a disadvantage, especially within the confines of the capital city of Angkor...[T]he lineages of influential Brahmans, often related to the leading aristocratic families, formed an essential part of the structure of the state at least from the time of Jayavarman II onwards.<sup>55</sup>

The sensitive interface between the two religions is visible in this Wàt Sithor admonition:

C35-6 Unless specially assigned, the Buddhist community should not attend [Brahmanical] sacrificial ceremonies. Those who go on their own account, even with good intentions, are guilty of an offence.

Yet the eclecticism of tantric Buddhism would have served to reduce friction with the Brahmanical establishment. Tantric Buddhism and tantric Śaivism had after all been interacting and borrowing from each other throughout the later Middle Ages. Indeed, Giuseppe Tucci sees blood sacrifice (like that prohibited to his followers by Kīrtipaṇḍita) as the major difference between them:

The cult of the Tantric Buddhas and Bodhisattvas does not differ in any manner from that by which Hindu devotees honoured their deities, to the exclusion, of course, of the bloody sacrifice, which Buddhism, as well as Vishnuism, always condemns as a sinful practice.<sup>56</sup>

The Wàt Sithor inscription shows the eclecticism almost reaching fusion in some sections:

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<sup>55</sup> Snellgrove, D (2001:54) *Khmer civilization and Angkor* Orchid press, Bangkok

<sup>56</sup> Tucci, Giuseppe (1949:219) *Tibetan Painted Scrolls* La Libreria dello Stato, Roma



C39-40 On the periodic moon day the purohita should perform the bath and the other acts for the Sage with Veda hymns (sūkta), āṛṣabha, brahmaghoṣa, eye-opening (unmīla) and sprinkling (abhiṣecana).

43-44 The dependent origination (pratītyopāda), brahmaghoṣa, Sad-Dharma, āṛṣabha, sūkta, śānti and avadhāra are remembered as the ghāthāveda.

Here the *sūkta*, *śānti* and *ghāthāveda* are Vedic verses and *āṛṣabha* (‘best of bulls’, rendered by Coëdès as ‘La Bonne Loi du Taureau’) is probably a Śaiva ceremony.

The inscription makes it clear that this was a culture of ritual power rather than a learned, early Mahāyānist culture focused on metaphysics, epistemology and logic. It was a practitioner’s culture of mandalas, mantras and mudrās employed in secret ceremonies and aimed at accelerating the attainment of Buddhahood and achieving supernatural powers. Initiates learnt the secrets of the thunderbolt and bell to invoke cosmic Buddhist deities and consubstantiate with them through visualisation and magic formulas. It was a tantric culture which sat easily with the yogic skills and rituals of Śaivism, which had been the state cult of the Khmers for several centuries.

### **Khmer tantric Śaivism**

Tantrism was not new to the Khmers: the principal Śaiva ritual authority for establishing the first Khmer kingdom, that defined the initial core area of the empire, may well have been tantric. Prabodh Chandra Bagchi notes that the ca 1052 A.D. Sdok Kak Thom inscription refers to four Śaiva tantric works *Śiraścheda*, *Sam̐moha*, *Nayottara* and *Vinaśikha* (teachings of the four faces of Tumburu),<sup>57</sup> which the inscription identifies as the empowering scriptures for a special ritual inaugurated in 802 A.D. under king Jayavarman II to guarantee the new kingdom’s independence from ‘Java’ [Land Zhen-La or ‘Mūang Chavā’, the Luang Prabang of modern Laos?]<sup>58</sup>. Alexis Sanderson describes these texts as ‘the principal Tantras of the Vāma (left) branch of the Vidyāpītha, teaching the cult of Tumburu and his four sisters Jayā, Vijayā, Jayantī/Ajitā and Aparājitā.’<sup>59</sup> Some scholars have argued that the Sdok Kak Thom author was anachronistically imposing these Tantras as the source, 250 years earlier, for an 802 *devarāja* ritual, because this would be earlier than any other historical mention of these texts; but what the inscription makes undeniable is that Khmer Śaivism had long embedded tantric practices

<sup>57</sup> Prabodh Chandra Bagchi (1975:1) *Studies in the Tantras*, Part I, University of Calcutta

<sup>58</sup> See the case made for this interpretation by Tatsuo Hoshino (1986:42) *Pour une histoire médiévale du moyen Mékong* Editions Duang Kamol, Bangkok

<sup>59</sup> Alexis Sanderson (1997:1-47) ‘History through textual criticism’ in *Les sources et le temps* Ed. François Grimal, EFEO Pondicherry

and the Khmer elite was assuredly comfortably accustomed to them by the 10<sup>th</sup> -11th centuries. Sanderson further points out that the 967 A.D. Bantéay Srei inscription, at the end of Rajendravarman II's reign, describes Hotar Śivacārya as having been consecrated into the Śaiva mandala taught in the *Niśvāsa*.

### **The temple art**

Next the temple art. The remnants of Khmer temple art from the late 10<sup>th</sup> century also reflect the presence of the Vajrayāna. The French call the final quarter of the 10<sup>th</sup> century the 'Khleang' period after two elegant and somewhat mysterious sandstone halls erected opposite the Royal palace in Angkor, whose purpose is unknown. Khleang-style sculpture is rare, highly refined, exquisitely finished and predominantly Śaiva. The Musée Guimet in Paris has an exceptional group of Buddhist 'Khleang-style' pieces standing together that warrant particular attention. [Fig. 1]

Another piece is a large sandstone caitya from Kbal Sre Yeay Yin, near Phnom Srok, an area where inscriptions and icons indicate the presence of an old Buddhist community living beside the road heading northwest of Angkor to Īsān that later became the imperial highway to Lopburi and the sea. [Fig. 2]



Fig 1.

Fig.2

The EFEO electronic archive in Siem Reap has photographs of this caitya, and others, on the mound before being removed to Phnom Penh and Paris. A visit to Phnom Srok in January 2005 showed that there are two main sacred mounds in the village. One piece of the same pink-red sandstone as the caityas lies on the Kbal Sre Yeay Yin mound showing the sculpted

base of a Nāga Buddha's tail. The thick walls of a tiny sanctuary remain embedded in a larger mound in the grounds of Srah Chik primary school. The teachers say the site is a sacred '*prasat*' occupied by local territorial *neak ta* who are propitiated with offerings to solve family problems and illness. They said the monks from Wāt Siset in the village used to hold Buddhist festivals there in former President Lon Nol's time (early 1970s) but these were stopped by the Khmers Rouges and never revived. The Kbal Sre Yeay Yin caitya has a remarkable place in the history of Khmer Buddhism for three reasons.

First, the three metre sandstone pillar bears the first known representation in the Khmer empire of the five cosmic Buddhas of the *Vajradhatu Mahāmandala*, the pre-eminent mandala of tantric Buddhism that is first fully defined in the *STTS*. The Vajradhatu Pentad appears in a unique presentation which nevertheless accords closely with the text of the Tantra. On the crowns of Vajrapāṇi's three visible heads are mounted the four directional Tathāgatas and Mahāvairocana. Such a headdress of Buddhas, unique in Khmer iconography, is commonplace in a slightly different form in Nepal and Tibet where it is called the *pañcabuddhamukuta* ('crown with/of five Buddhas') and is used in standard initiation rituals.<sup>60</sup> On the Phnom Srok caitya the special headdress seems to depict Vairocana's final warning to the still arrogant Śiva in the *STTS* that 'Vajrapāṇi is the overlord of all the Tathāgatas.'<sup>61</sup> At the climactic moment in the Tantra, Vajrapāṇi swells up into his wrathful *Trailokyavijaya* form and kills Śiva in a classic duel, before reviving him as a Buddha, 'the lord of the ashes', and admitting him to the *Mahāmandala*. The caitya's image of Vajrapāṇi could indeed be an illustration of the deity's *Trailokyavijaya* form:

His eyebrows tremble with rage, with a frowning face and protruding fangs; he has a great krodha appearance. He holds the vajra, ankuśa-hook, sharp sword, a pāśa-noose and other āyudha.<sup>62</sup>

The second remarkable aspect of the caitya is that it also bears one of the earliest known Khmer Buddhas seated on the coils of a giant Nāga, whose multiple heads rise in a hood over his head. This distinctive image was to become the supreme icon of Khmer Buddhism for three centuries

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<sup>60</sup> De Mallmann describes Mahākāla, for example, as 'couronné des Cinq Buddha' (*pañcabuddhamukutinam*) Mallmann, Marie-Therese de (1986:238) *Introduction à l'iconographie du tântrisme bouddhique* Maisonneuve, Paris

<sup>61</sup> Ian Astley-Kristensen refers to a Shingon ritual centred on Vajrasattva which '...is concerned with visualizing the Five Buddhas atop one's head, as a kind of variation on the usnīsa. In this sense they would thus be a crown, insofar as they cover the whole crown of one's head.' (Astley-Kristensen, Ian 1991:50 *The Rishukyō: The Sino-Japanese Tantric Prajñāpāramitā in 150 Verses (Amoghavajra's Version)* Institute of Buddhist Studies, Tring).

<sup>62</sup> *STTS* 18.882.369b-373b

– from these early caityas to the main icon in the central sanctuary of ancient Cambodia’s first Buddhist temple of state, the Bâyon. The meaning of the Nāga Buddha remains mysterious, but the context given in the Wât Sithor inscription and the mention of the ‘*tattvasaṅgrahaṭīkādi tantram*’ provides a possible clue. The Nāga appears to link the Buddha with the autochthonous serpent cults that long predated the arrival of Indic religions in Southeast Asia.<sup>63</sup> Large serpents with long necks and multiple, crested heads like those on the caitya had long been accorded prominence in Khmer Hindu temples. The recall of religious beliefs from time immemorial no doubt conferred a primordial status on the Buddha, who sits in the timelessness of the meditational dhyāna mudrā. His transcendent state may also tie in with the cosmic setting of the *STTS*, where vast numbers of Buddhas preside over multiple universes and are ultimately conceived as emanations of one primordial Buddha.<sup>64</sup> Wât Sithor mentions Vairocana, the fifth Ādi-Buddha by his conventional title ‘Sarvavid’ (the all-knowing) and makes him the head of an ancient and august lineage:

B37-38 tatsthāne sthāpitā sthityai sarvavidvaṅśabhāsvataḥ  
 prajñāpāramitā tārī jananī yena tāyinām //

For the continuity (sthiti) and splendour (bhāsva) of the lineage (vaṅśa) of Sarvavid, he erected in this place the saviouress (?tārī) Prajñāpāramitā, the mother (jananī) of the protectors (tāyin, Buddhas).

[Coèdes: Il érigea en cet endroit, pour perpetuer la lumière de la famille des Omniscients, une Prajñāpāramitā, mère des (Buddha) protecteurs].<sup>65</sup>

It is possible that the primordial Khmer Buddha seated on a Nāga throne is intimately associated with or fused with the conception of Vairocana, the fifth transcendental Buddha who presides over the events of the *Tattvasaṅgraha-tantra* and holds the central position in the *vajradhātu-mahāmandala*. Indeed Śākyamuni is transformed into Vairocana in the *Sarvadurgatīśodana-tantra* which also features a mandala with 37

<sup>63</sup> The first scholar to resist the consensus view that the Khmer Nāga Buddha represented the Mucalinda story was Hiram Woodward. He saw that the Khmer icon ‘should be interpreted not so much as Śākyamuni, sheltered by Mucalinda subsequent to the enlightenment, as a supreme Buddha in the embrace of an autochthonous spirit of the waters.’ Woodward, H (1997) *The sacred sculpture of Thailand* Thames & Hudson, London

<sup>64</sup> Despite the large number of art historians who refer to the Khmer Nāga Buddha as Śākyamuni sheltered from a storm by the serpent Mucalinda shortly after his enlightenment, no inscription or other evidence has been found to substantiate such a link. David Snellgrove points to the Khmer icon being different when he says: ‘Although [Buddha Mucalinda is] well known in all other Buddhist traditions, only in Cambodia is this [Nāga Buddha] envisaged as representing the supreme manifestation of buddhahood.’ Snellgrove, D. (2001:59) *Khmer civilization and Angkor* Orchid Press, Bangkok. Although I believe it can be argued that the Nāga Buddhas of Peninsular Thailand and Sri Lanka are also transcendental, I concur with Snellgrove’s essential distinction.

<sup>65</sup> Here again Coèdes went for a slightly less specific translation.

deities.<sup>66</sup> One of Vairocana's mudrās is the meditational *dhyāna mudrā* with both hands in the lap that is characteristic of the Khmer Nāga Buddha.<sup>67</sup> Moreover, although Vairocana's vehicle is usually a lion, it is sometimes given as a dragon or Nāga.<sup>68</sup> If the *STTS* was the major text of the Khmer Buddhist revival, we would expect to find some representation of Vairocana as well as Vajrapāṇi, as they are the two co-principals of the text. On the Kbal Sre Yeay Yin caitya in the Guimet, we find the Nāga Buddha sitting beside Vajrapāṇi. [Fig.3]



Fig. 3

When we look for possible connections between the first Nāga Buddha from Phnom Srok and the Wāt Sithor reference to Vairocana, it should be noted that we are taking evidence from the northwest and southeast extremities of the core section of the Angkorian kingdom. For Wāt Sithor lies far southeast of Angkor and close to the modern capital of Phnom

<sup>66</sup> Huntington archive <http://kaladarshan.arts.ohio-state.edu/studypages/internal/213slides/JCH/Lecture7/index07.html>

<sup>67</sup> Vairocana is seen in three principal mudrās: the *bodhyagrī-mudrā* (with the index of the left hand seized by the fist of the right before the chest), the meditational mudrā and the dharmacakra mudrā. In the two great mandalas of Japan's Tantric Shingon and Tendai sects he appears in *bodhyagrī-mudrā* in the *vajradhatu* mandala and in meditational mudrā in the *garbhadhatu* mandala. Tajima, R (1959) 'Les deux grands mandalas et la doctrine de l'esoterisme Shingon' in *Bulletin de la Maison Franco-Japonaise* VI Tokyo/Paris. Saso, Michael (1991) *Homa rites and Mandala Meditation in Tendai Buddhism* Aditya Prakashan, Delhi.

<sup>68</sup> Bhattacharyya, B. (1949:16) *Nispannayogāvalī of Mahāpandita Abhayākaragupta* Oriental Institute, Baroda. See also the Javanese horned lion/dragon (with lion's feet!) emerging from the throne under the late 10<sup>th</sup> century Mahāvairocana of the Nganjuk mandala in Leiden (Scheurleer, Pauline Lunsingh & Klokke, Marijke J. 1988:33 *Divine Bronzes: ancient Indonesian bronzes from CE 600- 1600 E.J.* Brill, Leiden).

Penh. This geographical fact demonstrates that in the space of the two decades that separate the inscriptions of Wāt Sithor and the first ones of the Buddhist revival at Bāt Čum in Angkor, Buddhism had rooted itself in foundations spread over a broad swath of territory through the centre of the kingdom -- from the modern Thai border, through the capital, to the south-eastern region of the kingdom. This rapid spread implies the new Buddhism had wealthy patrons (including of course the kings). Minister and general Kavīndrārimathana, who built Bāt Čum, is described as one of the wealthiest men of the kingdom. Wāt Sithor says Kīrtipaṇḍita ‘amassed an immense fortune’<sup>69</sup> with which he ‘restored a large number of Buddha images in diverse regions and had lakes and ashrams assigned to them.’<sup>70</sup> He also erected ‘innumerable new icons and well-furnished temples.’<sup>71</sup>



Fig. 4

Today the Wāt Sithor temple has been rebuilt in the current Theravādin tradition beside an old stūpa-like brick *prāsāda* [Fig. 4] where the Prajñāpāramitā icon mentioned in line B38 was presumably erected. A multi-headed, multi-armed, tantric Prajñāpāramitā was a major force in

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<sup>69</sup> A47-8

<sup>70</sup> B43-44

<sup>71</sup> B45-46

Like Kīrtipaṇḍita, Amoghavajra two centuries earlier assigned all the wealth he amassed through royal patronage, including prime land beside the imperial residences, to the Buddhist cause. His will states: ‘The carts, cows and the Chiao-nan estate in Hu-hsien, as well as the newly-bought lands and the rice fields near the river of the imperial residences and the vegetable fields on the south side of the road, I am leaving all to the chapel below the Mañjuśrī Pavilion of this cloister, in order to provide the monks who chant the sūtras with a permanent supply of grain, oil, fuel and other things.’ Orlando 1981:127

the Khmer Buddhist revival and one of the three sanctuaries of Bāt Čum is dedicated to her image. She sometimes appears larger in size or with more arms and heads (and more powers) than the Vajrapāṇis and Lokeśvaras who appear beside her on caityas. The Khmer cult of Prajñāpāramitā is stronger and shown in more varied iconography than anywhere else in the Buddhist world. No scholar has yet proposed an explanation for why Prajñāpāramitā has such a long, prominent and variegated career in Khmer Buddhism. But if the Nāga Buddha does represent, then the long tradition of images of Prajñāpāramitā accounts perhaps not only for the key concepts of the higher wisdom of the early Mahāyāna but also for her status as the Prajñā of Vairocana. Several texts refer to her as ‘mother of all the Buddhas’, as does line A38 of Wāt Sithor. In Khmer inscriptions this may place her on the same prime mover level as Vairocana. In the contemporary Prasat Ben Vien inscription from Rājendravarman II’s reign, for example, lines 7/8 are translated by Cœdès as:

Resplendissante est la Prajñāpāramitā qui enfante la lignée des Jina, et dont l’aspect est semblable à celui de la substance originelle donnant l’existence aux trois mondes.<sup>72</sup>

In one of the Bāt Čum inscriptions, Prajñāpāramitā clearly shares Vairocana’s strong association with the sun (his name means ‘sun-disk’):

La prajnaparamita resplendit, faisant la Fortune – l’épanouissement – de la terre – du lotus –, détruisant la grande obscurité –, et connaissant les besoins des Créatures; manifestant le charme de son disque, soleil (qui éclaire) la route du Nirvāna, elle répand jour et nuit sans vaciller son éclat brillant et favorable.<sup>73</sup>

A primeval mother goddess is what Prajñāpāramitā represents when she appears seated on the left knee of Sarvavid Vairocana in the tantric Buddhist art of the Pāla dynasty of Bengal. Here Vairocana and Prajñā are carved in relief as a combined Ādibuddha on ninth century Pāla stones used as the centre-pieces for powder or sand mandalas in tantric rituals.<sup>74</sup> Among Khmer icons, Prajñāpāramitā is the only other deity, along with Avalokiteśvara, who is eventually represented in the 11-headed, thousand-armed form first defined in the *Karandavyūha-sūtra*, which held a pre-eminent position in Chinese and Japanese esoteric Buddhism. On the caitya from Kbal Sre Yeay Yin, her five heads and 10 arms are more numerous than those of the Vajrapāṇi-trailokyavijaya she

<sup>72</sup> IC V page 101

<sup>73</sup> Cœdès, G. (1908 :213-52) ‘Les inscriptions de Bāt Čum (Cambodge)’ *Journal Asiatique* 10

<sup>74</sup> Vairocana, in bodhiagri mudrā, is seated beside his Prajñā in what is probably a late 10<sup>th</sup> century Nganjuk hoard-style bronze in the Rijksmuseum. Scheurleer says the Prajñā, who is in the same mudrā, could be Locana, Vajradhavisvara or Prajñāpāramitā (Scheurleer, Pauline Lunsingh & Klokke, Marijke J. 1988:99 *Divine Bronze: ancient Indonesian bronzes from CE 600- 1600* E.J. Brill, Leiden)

stands next to. Later on Khmer sculptors cast her in *ekādaśamukha* form with 11 heads and 22 arms; in this form too she may represent an aspect of Vairocana. Recent work by Tove Neville suggests that the first Indian Avalokiteśvara with 11 heads piled up vertically has 11 heads because three represent the Buddha Vairocana in the three Buddha ‘bodies’ *dharmakāya*, *sambhogakāya* and *nirmānakāya*, who is surrounded by the eight great Bodhisattvas or *mahāsattvas*.<sup>75</sup> All 11 are therefore present in the complex figure. It is perhaps because of her primeval mother status as the *prajñā* of Vairocana, that the Cambodians modelled an *ekādaśamukha* Prajñāpāramitā in this way, to represent Vairocana and the great Bodhisattvas. Certainly this vision of Vairocana was well known in the region, for Vairocana surrounded by the eight Bodhisattvas had for centuries been stamped onto votive tablets in the Mahāyāna corridor ports running along the trade route to Cambodia from peninsular Śrīvijaya-Dvāravatī.

### **Bàt Čum and its *yantra***

The Khmer Buddhist Renaissance was launched with the dedication (possibly officiated by Kīrtipaṇḍita, though the inscriptions do not say so<sup>76</sup>) in 953 CE of the modest triple sanctuary brick temple of Bàt Čum in the new capital – set ‘in the middle of a multitude of charming palaces.’<sup>77</sup> For anyone but a king to erect a temple to the gods in the capital is rare indeed in Cambodia. The ‘eminent Buddhist’ who did so is identified in the inscription as the royal minister, general, architect and poet Kavīndrārimathana. Śaiva King Rājendravarman II was beholden to this exceptional Buddhist for several foreign military victories as well as for constructing the temples and palaces that welcomed the court back to Angkor after more than a decade’s absence in Koh Ker. Bàt Čum’s door-jamb inscriptions dedicate the foundation to the Buddha, Vajrapāṇi and Prajñāpāramitā (here named Divyadevi or celestial goddess).

The design of the Bàt Čum towers and the decoration of its lintels is close, if on a smaller scale, to that of Rājendravarman’s first Brahmanical

<sup>75</sup> The earliest known 11-headed Avalokiteśvara is an eighth century high relief carving in a cave at Kanheri, Bombay. The first mandala of Vairocana and the eight great bodhisattvas is believed to be a c.700 AD mural in a cave at Ellora, also in west central India. See Neville, Tove (1998:17) *Eleven-headed Avalokiteśvara* Munshiram Manoharlal, Delhi. Vairocana within a ring of the eight great Bodhisattvas is one of the most common 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> century clay votive tablets made by the peninsula Buddhists who were linked with Cambodia by the trade route.

<sup>76</sup> Kīrtipaṇḍita was certainly active from the opening years of Rājendravarman’s reign because the Wāt Sīthor inscription records him as erecting images in 947 at the village of Rmapattana (stanzas B47,8).

<sup>77</sup> ‘In eight-mountains-arrows [875 saka = 953 AD], this eminent Buddhist [Kavīndrārimathana] erected here with devotion a great image of the Jina, a Diyadevī [Prajñāpāramitā] with a Śrīvajrapāṇi, in the middle of a multitude of charming palaces, as if this had been in his divine heart.’ Stanza XIX of the Bàt Čum inscription in Cœdès, G (1908:240) ‘Les inscriptions de Čum (Cambodge)’ *Journal Asiatique* 10



temple the East Mebon. But what makes Bāt Čüm unique, apart from its being dedicated to three Buddhist icons, is that tiles from tantric Buddhist *yantras*, or diagrams using the letters of the Sanskrit alphabet – the visual equivalent of mantras -- were excavated from the sanctuaries. One tile bears the incised image of a vajra.<sup>78</sup> George Cœdès reconstructed the probable configuration of the tiles, following the engraved marks of a lotus petal design, and concluded that the central eight petals (*astadala*) formed a ‘lotus of the heart’ (*hṛdaya-puṇḍarīka*).<sup>79</sup> In *kuṇḍalinī* yoga the *cakra* or nerve centre of the heart opens the adept to achieve junction with the divine nature of the Buddhas. The three Bāt Čüm inscriptions all describe the Bāt Čüm towers erected by Kavīndrārimathana as poor, material reflections of the lotus of his heart:

Ayant réalisé l’union caractérisée par l’identité de son propre esprit avec la nature divine du Buddha, il a acquis la science des yogin.<sup>80</sup>

*Kuṇḍalinī* yoga, both Hindu and Buddhist, aims to connect the astral or subtle body of the yogin with the gods by inciting the serpent *kuṇḍalinī* to rise as a white fluid up through the four (Buddhist) or six (Hindu) nerve plexuses of the body which are conceived as *yantras* with Sanskrit characters. The clear implication is that Kavīndrārimathana was himself an accomplished yogin and his Buddhism was unquestionably tantric.

The Buddha image of Bāt Čüm is lost, but a number of statues found in Angkor and Roluos and attributed to the 10<sup>th</sup> century have Nāga heads similar to those of the Kbal Sre Yeay Yin caitya, with long, separated necks and head crests. The largest of these was recovered from one of the tanks on the third level of Angkor Wāt. [Fig.5]

<sup>78</sup> I am grateful to Christophe Pottier of the EFEO, Siem Reap for pointing this out.

<sup>79</sup> Cœdès, G. (1952:474) ‘Un *Yantra* récemment découvert à Angkor’ *Journal Asiatique* Paris

<sup>80</sup> Cœdès (1908:39)



Fig. 5

Wibke Lobo sees the Nāga rising behind the Buddha as a graphic rendering of the rising of *kuṇḍalinī* during yogic meditation. She suggests the three serpent coils invoke the three worlds (*dharmakāya*, *samboghakāya*, *nirmānakāya*) conquered by the Buddha as ‘Trailokyavijaya.’<sup>81</sup> Lobo’s interpretation does seem to be supported by both the Bāt Čüm *yantra* and the references to Kavīndrārimathana’s ‘lotus of the heart.’ Interestingly, the Nāgas that enthrone the Khmer Buddhas mostly have a series of cakras inscribed on their throats.

The Vajrapāṇi of Bāt Čüm is also lost, but the Musée Guimet has one of the largest and finest sculptures of the Khleang-style in the form of Vajrapāṇi which may have resembled it. In the *STTS* Vajrapāṇi takes centre stage and even at times comes close to eclipsing Vairocana.

<sup>81</sup> Lobo, W. (1997:273) ‘Buddha pare protégé par le nāga’ in *Angkor et dix siècles d’art khmer* eds. Jessop and Zephir, Réunion de Musées Nationaux, Paris.

Vajrapāṇi was honoured many times in the traditionally Buddhist Kompong Čam region, certainly before Jayavarman V's reign and possibly before his father Rajendravarman's, because the Wàt Sithor inscription says Kīrtipaṇḍita re-erected several collapsed icons of Vajrin and Lokeśvara whose pedestals had crumbled:

B39-40 He re-erected more than 10 images of Vajrin and Lokeśa, which were raised by Śrī Satyavarman on the eastern hill, whose pedestals were damaged.

The Vajrapāṇi from Tûol Či Tép (Bathéay District, Kompong Cam), above, is life-size and the quality of carving and the fine-grained stone suggest it is a product of the highest patronage in the land and the work of the royal workshop. Although Śaivism remained firmly in place as the state religion under Rājendravarman II and Jayavarman V, the quality of material and craftsmanship of this Vajrapāṇi suggests the highest patronage in the land. As the closest forebears of the fierce, fanged face were the *dvarapala* guardians of Koh Ker and earlier Śaiva temples, in 1910 George Cœdès first identified the Vajrin-Trailokyavijaya as a yaksa.<sup>82</sup> Ironically it was Maheśvara's contemptuous dismissal of Vajrapāṇi as a *Yaksa-rāja* that precipitated his final defeat in their duel in the *STTS*.

## Conclusion

This paper argues that the new platform for reconstructing Khmer Buddhism in the mid-10<sup>th</sup> century was the Vajrayāna. The principal evidence adduced is the Wàt Sithor inscription from the reign of Jayavarman V, which is exceptional in Khmer epigraphy in the way it elucidates the texts and doctrines taken as authority by the new Buddhist leaders. Yet the inscription's reference to the *Tattvasaṃgraha-tantra* (*STTS*) and its commentary (*tīkā*) by Śākyamitra was obscured in the French translation of the Sanskrit. Moreover, the inscription describes the life's work of Kīrtipaṇḍita, a Buddhist sage who sent abroad<sup>83</sup> to bring home these classics of tantric Buddhism and then use them to found a widespread Buddhist culture of learning, rituals and yogic techniques based on the Vajrayāna. The inscription thus establishes that the Buddhism of Cambodia in its 10<sup>th</sup> century revival was tantric.

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<sup>82</sup> Cœdès G. (1910:cat. 38) *Pièces originales de sculpture khmère conservées au Musée Indochinoise du Trocadero et au Musée Guimet* Imprimerie Nationale, Paris

<sup>83</sup> Chinese pilgrims from the early centuries of the last millennium had long established the heroic Buddhist tradition of hazardous and lengthy voyages by land and sea to bring back Sūtras and Tantras for translation. The early voyages of Faxian and Xuanzang were maintained as a model by Vajrabodhi, Amoghavajra and Prajñā.

Supporting evidence for this reevaluation of Khmer Buddhism is found in the refined Buddhist temple art in the ‘Khleang style’, which reflects the pantheon of the *STTS*. Khleang-style sacred art is overwhelmingly Brahmanical, but a small series of high quality icons, apparently produced by the best craftsmen from the best materials in the royal workshops, accords prominence to the tantric deity Vajrapāṇi, notably in the wrathful ‘*Trailokyavijaya*’ form in which he defeats Śiva and brings him into the *Vajradhatu* mandala. This is the pre-eminent mandala of tantric Buddhism, presided over by Vairocana and the four directional Jinās, which is first defined in the *STTS* and which makes its first appearance in Khmer iconography in the crowns of Vajrapāṇi’s three heads on this pillar. In his *Trailokyavijaya* (‘conqueror of three worlds’) form, Vajrapāṇi (‘Vajrin’ in Khmer texts) is said by Vairocana to represent all the Tathāgatas in his battle with Śiva. The Wāt Sithor inscription also mentions Vairocana, the presiding deity of the *STTS*, and the supreme Ādibuddha of this middle period pantheon of tantric Buddhism. It is suggested that Vairocana may provide a clue to the identity of the mysterious supreme Khmer Buddhist icon – the Nāga-enthroned Buddha. No known inscription gives any hint of the meaning of the Nāga Buddha icon, which became ubiquitous two centuries later in the reign of Buddhist king Jayavarman VII. The tenuous link with Vairocana depends on the Nāga Buddha sitting in the transcendent meditational *dhyāna mudrā* (one often used to identify Vairocana) and on the fact that in some areas the vehicle of Vairocana is a dragon or Nāga. The only contextual evidence from Cambodia that offers reinforcement for identifying the Nāga Buddha as Vairocana is the co-location of the *first* Khmer Nāga Buddha and the *first* Vajrapāṇi -*Trailokyavijaya* on adjacent sides of 10<sup>th</sup> century caityas like that from Phnom Srok in the Musée Guimet. Since this Vajrapāṇi, with the Tathāgata Pentad of transcendent Buddhas from the *Vajradhatu* mandala borne in the crowns he wears, is close to the *STTS* descriptions of him during his battle with Śiva, the Buddha seated beside him on a Nāga on the caitya could be a depiction of Vajrapāṇi’s co-principal of the of the *STTS*, namely Vairocana. But whether or not the Nāga Buddha is ever satisfactorily identified with Vairocana, the Nāga appears to be related to the *kuṇḍalinī* yoga of Tantrism. And we know that *kuṇḍalinī* yoga was practised by the Buddhist sect that built Bāt Čüm because tiles bearing lotus petals and Sanskrit letters excavated from the small brick temple amount to a statement that the builder, the king’s minister Kavīndrārimathana, was an accomplished exponent of tantric Buddhist form of yoga.

Kīrtipaṇḍita’s life’s work laid a strong base for the expansion of Buddhism in Cambodia until it became the state religion in the 12<sup>th</sup>

century. This brief re-assessment of Kīrtipaṇḍita's Buddhism, and of the Buddhist temple art of the late 10<sup>th</sup> century, projects an intriguing new light on the subsequent evolution of Khmer Buddhism, which culminates in the Bāyon state temple of Jayavarman VII. But that exploration demands a much longer study.

## Stela of Wāt Sithor, Kompong Čam 968 CE

(Partial English translation by Tadeusz Skorupski, SOAS from the Sanskrit in G. Cœdès 1954 IC VI)

### Section A

37-38 tasyopāntacaro vidvān ākīrṇnakīrttipūrṇendur	vidyāmbhonidhipāragah ācāryyah kīrtipaṇḍitaḥ //
39-40 niśśesaśācastrajaladhīn labdhvārthatattvaratnāni	tirtvā vīryyoduvena yah vibheje dhīdhanārthinām //
41-42 saujanyaḍiguṇāḥ khyātāḥ doṣās tv agantukā yasya	prakṛtyāgner ivoṣṇatā lohasya dravatā yathā //
43-44 hṛdi roṣādayo yasya krīdoragā iva kṣipram	kathaṅ cid yadi jṛmbhitāḥ yayur vvidyāvidheyatā[t //]
45-46 catussandhyāsu yogātmā caturmmūdrātmako dharmmaṅ	caturddānānvito nva [ham] catusparṣatsu yo – -
47-48 tyāgāyopārjītāsa [m]khyā- kvāpi ṣaṭpitakārthāḍhyo	svāpateyo pi dhī – - yas sūribhir udīrita[h //]
49-50 yah parasmai padaṅ karttā na tv ātmane padaṅ jātu	sarvabhāveṣu ka[r]mma[su] kenāpy uktaḥ prayo[ jayan //]

37-38 His close associate (ūpāntacara) was the ācārya Kīrtipaṇḍita, the scholar (vidvān) who traversed to the other shore of the ocean of knowledge, the full moon of vast fame.

39-40 Having crossed the ocean (jaladhi) of all śāstras with the boat of energy (vīrya-udupa), and having obtained the jewels of real value (arthatattva), he placed them in the domain (?vibheje) of those who desired (artin) them.

41-42 His kindness (benevolence, saujanya) and other qualities (guṇa) were acclaimed (to be) like the primordial fire, while his defects (doṣa) were adventitious like the artificial fluidity of iron.

43-44 Whenever anger (roṣa) and other (vices) surfaced in his heart, they quickly subsided like pet snakes (krīda-uraga)<sup>84</sup> due to the rectitude of his knowledge.

45-46 During the four daily periods (sandhyā) he practised yoga and every day he offered the four gifts.<sup>85</sup> He was endowed with the character of the four mudrās,<sup>86</sup> and (preached) the Dharma amid the four assemblies (parisat).<sup>87</sup>

<sup>84</sup> Krīda, play, sport, dally. Uruga: snake; Urugāja is the name of Vāsuki, king of this category of serpents.

<sup>85</sup> Material possessions (āmisa), fearlessness (abhaya), Dharma, benevolence (maitrī).

<sup>86</sup> In the Tantras: karmamudrā, samayamudrā, dharmamudrā, mahāmudrā.

There is also a triple dharmamudrā: (1.) all formations are impermanent; (2.) all dharmas are with self; (3.) nirvāṇa is real (satya). In Asaṅga's sūtrālamkāra there is a fourfold dharmodāna: (1.) all mental formations are impermanent (sarvasamskāraṅ aniyāḥ); (2) all mental formations

47-48 Although his own immense amassed wealth was for charity (tyāga), everywhere (kvāpi) he was spoken of by learned people as being rich in the meaning of the Pitakas.<sup>88</sup>

49-50 In all his conduct and in all his actions he referred to others, and no-one ever said he was implying himself.

### Section B

3-4	nairātmyacittmātrādi- mithyādr̥ṣṭiniśā yasmin	darśanārkkas tiraskṛtaḥ bhūyo dina ivāvabhau //
5-6	śāstraṃ madhyavibhāgādyam <sup>89</sup> kāladoṣāniladhvastaṃ	dīpaṃ saddharmmapaddhateḥ bhūyo jvālayati sma yaḥ //
7-8	lakṣaḡrantham abhiprajñam tattvasaṅgrahaṭīkādi-	yo nveṣya pararāṣṭrataḥ tantrañ cādhyāpayad yamī //
21-22	rāṣṭramaṅḡalalarakṣārtahaṃ maṅḡdirābhyaṅtare bhīkṣṇam	satkṛtyāyuṅkta yan nṛpaḥ śāntipuṣṭyādikarmmasu //
27-28	advayānuttaram yānam yo diśan munaye haimaṃ	anyeṣāṃ svam ivārjjayan rājataṃ śivikādvayam //
29-30	mahaṭ tāmramayaṃ yaś ca prāsādaṃ maṅihemāḡdhyam	bhavanācchādanam muneh tārasimhāsanam vyadhāt //
33-34	vāhyaṃ guhyañ ca saddharmmaṃ pūjārthan tasya saṃghasyā-	sthāpayitvā cakāra yaḥ tithes ca pṛthagāśramān //
37-38	tatsthāne sthāpitā sthityai prajñāpāramitā tāri	sarvvaividvaṅśabhāsavataḥ jananī yena tāyinām //
39-40	śrīsatyavarmmaṅā bajri- sthāpitāḥ prāḡ girāu bhagnā-	lokeśārccā daśādhikāḥ sanā yo tiṣṭhipat punaḥ //

3-4 In him the sun of the nairātmya, cittamātra and other doctrines (darśana), eclipsed by the night of erroneous views (mithyādr̥ṣṭi), shone stronger than the day.

5-6 Among the texts (paddhati) of the Sad-Dharma, he intensified the blaze of the Madhy(ānt)avibhāga and other śāstras that had been obscured (lost/eclipsed, dhvasta) by the wind of time and error.

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are painful (sarvasamskāra duḥkhāḥ; (3.) all dharmas are without a self (sarvadharmā anātmānaḥ); (4.) peaceful is nirvāṇa (śāntam nirvāṇam).

<sup>87</sup> Upāsaka, upāsikā, bhikṣu, bhikṣunī.

<sup>88</sup> Vinayapitaka, Sūtrapitaka, Abhidharmapitaka, Bodhisattvapitaka, Dhāranipitaka...? See Lomotte, Étienne (1958 :286) *Histoire du Bouddhisme Indien : des origines à l'ère Śaka* Institut Orientaliste, Louvain

<sup>89</sup> *Madhyavibhāgaśāstra* = the *Madhyāntavibhāgaśāstra* of Maitreya.

7-8 Having searched<sup>90</sup> in a foreign kingdom for one hundred thousand book(s) of higher wisdom<sup>91</sup>, the self-restrained one (sage)<sup>92</sup> taught<sup>93</sup> the Tantra teachings (*tantram*) of texts such as the *Tattvasaṃgraha* and its commentary.<sup>94</sup>

- 21-22 He was honoured and appointed by the king to perform inside the palace the peaceful (śānti), enriching (puṣṭi)<sup>95</sup> and other rites (karma) in order to protect the territory of the kingdom (rāstra-maṇḍala).
- 27-28 Procuring for others as if for himself the non-dual (advaya) and supreme (anuttara) vehicle (yāna)<sup>96</sup>, he bestowed on the Sage (muni) a pair of golden and silver palanquins (śivikā).
- 29-30 As a concealing canopy<sup>97</sup> for the Sage, he produced a large copper mansion (prāsāda) lavishly (adorned) with gems and gold with a star and lion throne (tāra-siṃha-āsana).
- 33-34 Having established the outer (bāhya) and secret (guhya)<sup>98</sup> Sad-Dharma, for worship (pūja) he made separate āśramas for his Saṅgha and guests (atithi).
- 37-38 For the continuity (sthiti) and splendour (bhāsva) of the lineage (vaṃśa) of Sarvavid<sup>99</sup>, he erected in this place the saviouress (?tāri) Prajñāpāramitā, the mother (jananī) of the protectors (tāyin, Buddhas).
- 39-40 He re-erected more than 10 images of Vajrin and Lokeśa, which were raised by Śrī Satyavarman on the eastern hill, whose pedestals were damaged.

### Section C

1-2	eṣā śrījayavarmamājñā vauddhānām anukarttavayā	buddhadharmmānucār[inī] mokṣābhyudayasiddhaye //
7-8	tato nighnanti pāpiṣṭhān devā nāgās samās tv ete	viṣamā vṛṣṭivāyavaḥ dharmmisthān ramayanti ca //
9-10	satvārthāya tataś śāstrā māse māse tathā kāryyāḥ	yathoktā dvādaśotsavāḥ krameṇa sukham icchatā ॐ

<sup>90</sup> anuveṣya from anu+iṣ: desire, seek, search after, aim at.

<sup>91</sup> Adhiprajñam for abhiprajñam.

<sup>92</sup> Yamīn means one who restrains or subdues his senses, or in this context sage.

<sup>93</sup> Adhyāpayad: adhi+i know by heart, in imperfect causative: teach, instruct.

<sup>94</sup> *Kosalālamkāra-tattvasaṃgraha-ṭīkā* by Śākyamitra. Kamalaśīla's commentary on Śāntarakṣita's *Tattvasaṃgraha* is called *Tattvasaṃgraha-pañjikā* and not *ṭīkā*. Thus it is fairly certain that the text in question is the Tantra and its commentary by Śākyamitra.

<sup>95</sup> These are two of the four standard or 'homa' rights described in the Tantras: ksānti (śānti), puṣṭi, vāśya (subduing), abhicāra (destruction).

<sup>96</sup> The compound advaya-anuttara-yāna (nondual-supreme-vehicle) implies the category of the highest Tantras.

<sup>97</sup> Bhavanācchādana can mean some form of housing mantle or canopy.

<sup>98</sup> Bāhya and guhya here appear to refer to Sūtras and Tantras.

<sup>99</sup> 'Sarvavid' in the Yoga Tantras is Vairocana.



11-12 sthāpitān diśi vahneḥ prāk- triṣkālaṃ pratyahaṃ gāndi[m]	sthāpanāyā mahāmuneḥ saṃpūjyākoṭayed yamī //
37-38 hr̥nmūdramantravidyāsu bajraghaṇṭārahasyajño	homakarmmaṇi kovidaḥ dakṣiṇīyaḥ purohitaḥ //
39-40 vedasūktarṣabhasvrahma- muneḥ parvvadine kuryyāt	ghoṣonmīlābhiṣecanaiḥ snānādīni purohitaḥ //
41-42 buddhasnānādibhir llokās antarbhūiā hi sarrvajña-	sukhitā dharmmavarddhanāḥ kāye satvāś carācarāḥ //
43-44 pratītyotpādanaṃ vrahma- sūktaś śāntiyavadhāraś ca	ghoṣas saddharma āṛṣabhaḥ gāthāveda iti smṛtaḥ //

- 1-2 This ordinance of Śrī Jayavarman follows the Buddha's Dharma and is to be practised by the Buddhists (bauddha) in order to attain the happiness of deliverance.
- 7-8 Thus the adverse rains and winds destroy the wicked (pāpiṣṭha) but the congenial devas and nāgas bring stability to the righteous (dharmiṣṭha).
- 9-10 Those who desire happiness should observe successively month after month the 12 festivals (utsava) as taught by the Teacher (śāstra) for the benefit of living beings (sattva).
- 11-12 Taking up position in the quarter of Vahni (god of fire) with the firmness of the Great Sage, the restrained one should strike the gong (gāndi = gandī) three times per day after giving worship.
- 37-38 The one who is skilled in the quintessences of deities (hr̥ts)<sup>100</sup>, mūdras, mantras, vidyās and the homa rite, and who is knowledgeable in the secret (rahasya) of the vajra and the ghaṇṭā, is a purohita worthy of his fees.
- 39-40 On the periodic moon day the purohita should perform the bath and the other things for the Sage with Veda hymns (sūkta), āṛṣabha, brahmaghoṣa, eye-opening (unmīla) and sprinkling (abhiṣecana).
- 41-42 The worlds are made happy and the Dharma is made prosperous by the Buddha's bath and the other activities. Indeed the animate and inanimate beings dwell inside the body (kāya) of the omniscient one (sarvajña).
- 43-44 The dependent origination (pratītyotpāda), brahmaghoṣa, Sad-Dharman, āṛṣabha, sūkta, śānti, and avadhāra are remembered as the ghāthāveda.<sup>101</sup>

<sup>100</sup> Hr̥ts = hr̥daya: quintessence of deities, like bīja or seed syllables.

<sup>101</sup> Apart from the initial Buddhist 'Ye dharma' these appear to be more Śaiva and Vedic hymns as in 39-40.

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### **Figures** (author's photographs)

Fig. 1 Group of 'Khleang-style' statues found at Tuol Ci Tep village, Batheay District, north of Phnom Penh, by Étienne Aymonier and sent in 1880 to the Musée Guimet.

Fig. 2 Vajrapāṇi one of four high reliefs sides of a caitya found at Kbal Sre Yeay Yin near Phnom Srok in northwest Cambodia. Musée Guimet MG 17487.

Fig. 3 Vajrapāṇi and Nāga-enthroned Buddha on Kbal Sre Yeay Yin caitya. Musée Guimet MG 17487.

Fig. 4 Wat Sithor laterite and brick stūpa-prāsāda at Wàt Sithor, Srei Santhor, Kandal.

Fig. 5 Nāga-enthroned Buddha found in a tank of Angkor Wat.