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Ashoka to Jayarman VII: Some Reflections on the Relationship between Buddhism and the State in India and Southeast Asia*

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From Aśoka to Jayavarman VII: Some Reflections on the Relationship between Buddhism and the State in India and Southeast Asia*

Hermann Kulke

Undoubtedly, Aśoka and Jayavarman VII, two of India's and Southeast Asia's greatest rulers, were Buddhists by all means. Aśoka produced the earliest and largest number of inscriptions of early India, all of them with a clear Buddhist connotation. And Jayavarman VII left to us, most likely, not only Southeast Asia's largest number of royal inscriptions but also the largest number of monuments in Angkor, all of them of a Buddhist nature as are his inscriptions, too. Aśoka and Jayavarman were not only rulers of India's and Southeast Asia's most impressive early and medieval states, which may rightly be termed as empires but under both of them, their states even reached their climax. However, the puzzling problem is that their deaths were followed by an inexorable decay of their erstwhile great empires. What matters in this context is that this decay was linked with a reaction against the Buddhism propagated by these great Buddhist rulers. The Buddhist tradition of a Brahmanical counteraction against Buddhism under the Śuṅgas has been refuted with good cause for long. After all, the marvellously carved railings of the Buddhist stūpa of Bharhut belong to the age of the Śuṅgas. But none of Aśoka's weak successors on the Mauryan throne is known to have followed his *dhamma* policy. Puṣyamitra Śuṅga, who killed the last Maurya ruler in 187 BCE, is known to have conducted two horse sacrifices, an act detrimental to Aśoka's *dhamma*.[1] Jayavarman VII's reign, however, was definitely "followed by a violent reaction

accompanied by acts of vandalism."[2] Buddhist temples founded by Jayavarman were converted to Śaivism which seems to have been reintroduced as the state cult. Hundreds of small Buddhist images were systematically destroyed in Preah Khan and Ta Prohm. In 1933, broken pieces of Bayon's principal image, a 3.6-m Buddha, were discovered at the bottom of its central well.[3] The crucial question is whether the causes of the posthumous fate of Aśoka's and Jayavarman's great achievements have to be traced to the biography of these rulers, or whether it represents an inherently ambivalent nature of the relationship between Buddhism and the state in India and pre-Theravāda Buddhist Southeast Asia.

Let me begin with some detailed deliberations on Aśoka. Without his elevation of Buddhism to a kind of state religion in his Indian empire and his dispatch of Buddhist messengers to foreign countries, Buddhism might not have spread across Asia. Instead, it might have remained an Indian religion in India like Jainism, preached by Mahāvīra, Buddha's contemporary.

AŚOKA'S DHAMMA POLICY AND DHAMMA POLITICS

If we look at the Mauryan state under Aśoka and its relationship with Buddhism, we are confronted with two seemingly contradictory corpora of sources, particularly the *Arthaśāstra* and the inscriptions of Aśoka. The *Arthaśāstra* is a political textbook for a powerful, highly centralised state, without even the slightest indication of Buddhism, whereas Aśoka's inscriptions are inspired by and imbued with his Buddhist missionary fervour. The situation is further complicated by the uncertainty of authorship and date of the *Arthaśāstra*, especially since Thomas Trautmann[4] and others distinguish clearly between distinct layers, several of which have to be dated to the early centuries CE. The other two strongly differing genres of sources are the "classical" Greek accounts, especially that of Megasthenes, and the legendary accounts of later centuries about Aśoka's great Buddhist deeds, as transmitted particularly by the Sri Lankan Pāli chronicles. They, too, strengthen the bipartite depiction of a powerful centralised Mauryan empire, on the one hand, and of Aśoka as an idealised exemplary Buddhist king on the other. This ambivalence of the available sources complicates the attempt to define the nature of the Mauryan state under Aśoka. In the following discussion, I shall refer primarily to Aśoka's inscriptions, the only definite contemporary sources of his statecraft.

The Mauryan state was the outcome and culmination of a continuous process of state formation in the extended Gangetic plain, a process which Romila Thapar once designated "from lineage to state." It passed through several distinct phases of development from Vedic chiefdoms and *janapadas* to the post-Vedic early kingdoms of the *mahājanapadas* and their fierce struggle for supremacy, which led to the rise of Magadha and, finally, to the foundation

of India's first trans-regional state under the Nandas. Little or, in fact, next to nothing is known about its actual structure and administration. However, it is very likely that it was not very different from what we know about the much better-documented Mauryan state under its founder, Candragupta. But there was at least one essential difference. The Nanda state consisted of formerly independent *mahājanapada* states. As they had already successfully passed through the early stages of state formation, they were endowed with a rudimentary administration at least and, in most cases, with fairly well-developed urban centres and networks of trans-regional trade. Candragupta and his son and successor, Bimbisāra, extended their realm far beyond into pre-state societies in central India and parts of far-off south India, a development of aggressive expansionism which reached its zenith with Aśoka's conquest of Kaliṅga. This stepwise rise of Magadha from a *mahājanapada* to the metropolitan core area of India's first empire under the Mauryas was based on a succession of sanguinary wars and what we would now call naked power politics. The permeation of their authority through vast hitherto unconquered (mostly) tribal areas required a new validation of dominion beyond the clan-oriented power politics of the post-Vedic state formation.

As is well known, the conquest of Kaliṅga in 261 BCE led to a crucial change in Aśoka's life, which had a very direct impact on the nature of the Mauryan state and the development of Buddhism. His famous thirteenth edict of his Major Rock Inscriptions (MRI) contains the very personal confession:

> When king Devanampriya [or "Beloved of the God"] had been anointed eight years, (the country of) the Kalingas was conquered by him. One hundred and fifty thousand in number were the men who were deported thence, one hundred thousand in number were those who were slain there, and many times as many those who died. After that, now that (the country of) the Kalingas has been taken, Devanampriya (is devoted) to a zealous study of morality (*dhamma*), to the love of morality, and to the instruction (of people) in morality. This is the repentance of Devanampriya on account of his conquest of (the country of) the Kalingas. [. . .] Even the hundredth part or the thousandth part of all those people who were slain, who died, and who were deported at that time in Kalinga, (would) now be considered very deplorable by Devanampriya. [. . .] And this conquest is [now] considered the greatest one, viz. the conquest by Dhamma (*dhamma-vijaya*).[5]

Few years later, in 258 BCE, Aśoka admitted in his MRIs that "initially I was not very zealous. But for a little more than a year, I have drawn close to the *sangha* and have been very zealous" and become an *upāsaka* or lay worshipper of Buddha.[6]

During that year, he went on a 256-day pilgrimage (*dhamma-yata*) and began his large-scale missionary activities. In numerous rock edicts strategically placed in all parts of his empire,[7] he published the *dhamma* principles of right conduct and sent ambassadors to spread his *dhamma* message abroad to all countries known to him. He instructed governors and district officers to have

inscribed the principles of his *dhamma* message on rocks and pillars wherever possible, thereby producing a series of smaller rock edicts in which he openly confessed his Buddhist faith. In the following year, in 257 BCE, he had the first four of his 14 major rock edicts cut into rocks at eight places in the frontier regions. In these edicts, Aśoka ordered all citizens of his empire to desist, as far as possible, from eating meat. He also prohibited illicit and unwanted meetings.[8] Aśoka indicated his goodwill to all the neighbours of his empire: to the Coḷas, Pāṇḍyas, Satyaputras and Keralaputras in south India, and to Tambapāṇi (Sri Lanka).

In the same year, he also undertook a unique act in the ancient world: he sent missionary ambassadors (*dūta*) to distant countries and kings of the Hellenistic world. These were the king of the Greeks (Yona), Antiyoka (Antiyochos II of Syria, 261-246 BCE), Tulumay (Ptolomy Philadelphos of Egypt, 285-247), Antekina (Antigonos Gonates of Macedonia, 276-239), Maka (Magas of Cyrene, *ca.* 300-250), and Alikasudala (probably Alexander of Epirus, 272-255).[9] However, more important for the future spread of "Buddhism across Asia" than his mission to these Mediterranean countries was his "conquest by dharma" (*dhamma vijaya*) of northwest India and Afghanistan, and south India as far as Karnataka and Sri Lanka. From Gandhāra, Buddhism penetrated into Central Asia from where it reached China via the Silk Road in the first century CE. From south India and Sri Lanka, it spread to Southeast Asia.[10]

Right from the beginning, Aśoka's endeavour to propagate his *dhamma* policy and get it carried out does not seem to have met with unrestricted approval. He indirectly admitted this when, in a new series of rock edicts in the thirteenth year after his coronation, he stated: "It is difficult to perform virtuous deeds. He who starts performing virtuous deeds accomplishes something difficult."[11] In order to break the resistance and intensify the teaching of right conduct, Aśoka appointed high officers called *dhamma-mahamattas*. They had to teach the right conduct and supervise people in its performance. They had to report to Aśoka personally who emphasised that they would have access to him at all times even if he was having his meals or residing in his private rooms. These officers were, as stated in the fifth major rock edict, "occupied everywhere here [in Pataliputra] and in all the outlying towns, in the harems of our brothers, sisters and whatever other relatives."[12]

The indisputable merits of Aśoka's "*dhamma* policy" after his joining the Buddhist community as an *upāsaka* layman are too well known to be elaborated in detail.[13] To mention just a few of them would suffice. Most revolutionary was his quest for pacifism and *ahiṃsā* or non-violence. After his conquest of Kaliṅga, he abstained from any further military conquests for nearly thirty years until his death and restricted the slaughter of animals for consumption as far as possible. In several inscriptions, he propagated a kind of social welfare

when he announced "I consider it my duty (to promote) the welfare of all men."[14] He demanded "courtesy to slaves and servants."[15] and had wells dugs and trees planted on the roads for the sake of men and animals.

However, while pursuing his missionary activities, Aśoka did not neglect his duties as a ruler. Despite his contrition after the conquest of Kaliṅga, he never thought of relinquishing his hold over this kingdom or sending back the people deported from there. And, as an astute politician, he also refrained from proclaiming his remorse in the rock edicts he put up at two places in Kaliṅga itself. Instead of the above-quoted text of the famous thirteenth rock edict in six other places, we find Aśoka's the most famous statement in two separate edicts at Dhauli and Jaugada in Kaliṅga: "All men are my children. As on behalf of (my own) children I desire that they may be provided by me with complete welfare and happiness in this world and the other world, even so is my desire on behalf of all men."[16] However, outside Kaliṅga, Aśoka announces in the thirteenth edict (after remorse for the sufferings caused by his conquest of Kaliṅga) a rather different policy towards the forest people:

> Even (the inhabitants of) the forests which are (included) in the dominions of Devanampriya, even those he pacifies and converts. And they are told of the power (to punish them) which Devanampriya (possesses) in spite of (his) repentance, in order that they may be ashamed (of their crimes) and not be killed.[17]

Aśoka seems to have regarded the forest tribes (*aṭavi*) of the frontier zones as dangerous enemies of his empire.[18] It is, therefore, not surprising that the two separate edicts of Kaliṅga, which till today is famous for its tribal population, proclaim in great detail Aśoka's instructions on how to "pacify and convert" the forest people to its provincial officers. The officers had to read out Aśoka's orders regularly "even to a single person" and they were visited by *dhamma mahāmātra* officers who "shall see that they carry out my instructions."

The strict orders to his provincial officers in Kaliṅga were not isolated instances. Aśoka's inscriptions are full of often very detailed instructions to officials and, increasingly, to the Buddhist *saṅgha* too. This is one of the most fascinating aspects of his inscriptions. After having sworn off the Kshatriya ideal of martial *digvijaya*s and having instead become a devoted follower of Buddha's *ahiṃsā* dharma, Aśoka seems to have been a passionate bureaucrat as well, giving detailed orders and controlling their execution. The most visible manifestation of this distinctive feature is, of course, his edicts. Their repeatedly new drafting and distribution, and the chiselling of at least three separate kinds of edicts at nearly 60 selected places[19] in his vast empire, some of them several thousand kilometres apart, required, as Gerald Fussman and others have shown, a meticulous administration.[20] In all likelihood, the process of production of the inscriptions was under Aśoka's direct control, even though not always to his full satisfaction, as he admitted himself. His instructions are

not only often quite rigid but are also usually characterised by excessive moralising and preaching.

Aśoka did not merely give instructions but also demanded reports about the execution of his orders. For instance, in the sixth rock edict of Girnār, we are informed:

> King Devanampriya Priyadarsin speaks thus. In times past, neither the disposal of affairs nor the submission of reports at any time did exist. But I have made the following (arrangement). Reporters (*pativedaka*) are posted everywhere, (with instructions) to report to me the affairs of the people at any time, while I am eating, in the harem, in the inner apartment, even at the cowpen, in the palanquin, and in the parks. And everywhere I am disposing of the affairs of the people. And if in the council (of *Mahamatras*) a dispute arises, or an amendment is moved, in connection with any donation or proclamation which I myself am ordering verbally, or (in connection with) an emergent matter which has been delegated to the *Mahamatras*, it must be reported to me immediately, anywhere and at any time.[21]

Particularly revealing in this edict is Aśoka's statement that, previously, the information system of secret informants or spies did not work properly. This is astonishing as Megasthenes reported a special estate or caste of informants and spies in the age of Candragupta, Aśoka's grandfather.[22] The *Arthaśāstra*, too, contains detailed instructions for them. But obviously, their efficiency did not meet Aśoka's expectations. Although we do not know whether he established an additional new institution with these *pativedaka* "reporters," his edicts clearly show that strengthening the centrally-controlled informant system was a major aim of his policy. A.L. Basham, therefore, was certainly right when he concluded that "Aśoka's reforms tended to centralization rather than devolution."[23]

What matters for us is that Aśoka also seems to have instrumentalised the propagation of his *dhamma* message and the control of its implementation as an additional means to strengthen his political control over his vast empire. The convergence of his political intentions and his *dhamma* policy might have been even stronger than hitherto assumed, if the *dhamma mahāmātras* were also recruited from among the Buddhist *saṅgha*, as recently proposed by Tilman Frasch.[24]

In this context, we may also have to consider that Aśoka used his position as a royal *upāsaka* or layman to interfere in questions of Buddhist teachings and *saṅgha* organisation. In the so-called "schism edict" of Sanchi, he twice expressed his desire that the *saṅgha* "may be united as long as the moon and sun shine" and ordered that "monk[s] and nun[s] who shall break up the Sangha" must be expelled from it.[25] His Bairat rock inscription, now at the Asiatic Society in Kolkata, contains his clearest confession of his Buddhist faith. Aśoka introduces himself to the *saṅgha* as "Priyadarshin, Raja in Magadha" with the words "it is known to you, Sirs, how great is my reference

and faith in the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha." But then he says: "I feel bound to declare," and lists seven canonical Buddhist texts, which have to be read out and to which "many groups of monks and nuns" [. . .] as well as laymen and laywomen "may repeatedly listen." The inscription ends with the significant words: "Sirs, I am causing this to be written, in order that they [the *saṅgha*] may know my intention."[26] Aśoka's instructions in religious matters, expressed with due respect to the religious authorities, clearly reveal his intention to strengthen the unity of the *saṅgha* and its Buddhist teaching as an essential basis of political authority.

In view of his seemingly very successful *dhamma* policy, one has to ask why his hope did not come true that "the sons, grandsons and great-grandsons of king Devanampriya will promote this practice of Dhamma until the destruction of the world. . . . For this is the best work, viz. instruction in Dhamma,"[27] an obviously wishful thinking which he expressed several times in his edicts. The easiest way to clarify this question is to blame Aśoka's pacifism for the decline of the late Mauryan state, which allegedly made it easy prey for foreign invaders from the northwest in the early second century BCE. This seemingly plausible explanation is often found in nationalist historical writings.

To my mind, the downfall of the Mauryan empire was primarily caused by the inherent problems of early state formation in India and by Aśoka's attempt to solve them through his *dhamma* policy. The extension of the predominantly north Indian Nanda state to an imperial pan-Indian empire extending even beyond the Hindukush under the three Mauryan rulers from Candragupta to Aśoka, required a new kind of universal validation and legitimacy. After the sanguinary conquest of Kaliṅga, Aśoka obviously realised the ideological deficiency of inherited traditional Brahmanical political teaching for ruling a vast subcontinental empire. In this situation, he may have perceived Buddhism not only as an alternative personal faith but must also have been aware of the great organisational capacity of the widespread *saṅgha* and its strong urban base as an additional and efficient medium for propagating his new *dhamma* policy, which provided "networks of loyalty which would be supportive of political needs."[28] In view of his personal Buddhist confession, it was evident that he chose the universal, translocal and transcultural ethics of Buddhism as his new "state ideology."

However, in view of the prevalent dominant Brahmanical traditions, the question remains as to what extent, or whether at all, Buddhism was able to provide a coherent ideology for an empire like the Mauryan state. After all, Buddhism had its origin in a religious movement with an inherent "notion of dissent." According to Romila Thapar, it was "seeking to establish a parallel society," although its articulation was often ambiguous. But she also points out that "one of the paradoxes of the Indian tradition is that the renouncer

is a symbol of authority within the society."[29] To my estimation, it was exactly this paradox which characterised the ambiguity of Aśoka's *dhamma* policy as a competing ideology with Rājadharma, the Brahmanical Kshatriya ideology. Based on Aśoka's personal belief system and his authority as a "royal renouncer" with the charisma of an "exemplary king," it seems to have operated successfully without any open opposition during his lifetime. The cause of its fading away after his death was not, as alleged, a Brahmanical reaction. It was the ambiguity of Aśoka's policy of centralising the state politically and strengthening his authority by *dhamma*. His quest for a universal change in mankind seems to have assumed the proportions of an ideological overstretch. During his later years, "his reign became increasingly obsessed with Dhamma," as pointed out by Thapar and other historians.[30]

However, as an ideal Buddhist king, Aśoka's fame remained alive in India for more than a millennium till today in Sri Lanka and in the Buddhist countries of Southeast and East Asia, to which his fame spread from the early centuries CE. The future development of the processes of state formation in India, though, were dominated by Brahmanical concepts of the state, validating regional statehood rather than pan-Indian empires.

JAYAVARMAN VII'S BUDDHIST SELF-AGGRANDISEMENT

Let us now take a look at Angkor and Jayavarman VII. He embodies the apotheosis of Mahāyāna Buddhism as the state ideology of Angkor. As it was strongly influenced by, or even based on, the inherited Hindu Devarāja cult, as was Aśoka's *dhamma* policy by the Brahmanical *Arthaśāstra* ideology, a short review of this cult is necessary. After a series of successful wars, the empire of Angkor was founded in 802 by Jayavarman II with the grand ritual consecration of a Śivaliṅgam with the name Devarāja on Mahendraparvata (Phnom Kulen), about 60 km northeast of Angkor. The Devarāja, the tutelary deity of Angkor, is supposed to have been re-established ritually again and again on top of the newly-constructed royal temple pyramids of Angkor until the late eleventh century. The names of the *liṅgams* on top of the temple-mountains combined the names of the ruling kings and founders of these temples with *īśvara* "the Supreme Lord" or "god," an epithet for Śiva. Thus, for instance, the *liṅgam* on the Bakheng, built by Yaśodhavarman in the late ninth century as the first central temple pyramid in Angkor, bears the name *Yaśodheśvara*.

The Devarāja cult has caused much ink to flow primarily because, according to the rules of Sanskrit grammar, *devarāja* allows for two very different interpretations: "the king who is the god" and "the king of gods." It was particularly George Coedès, the doyen of Angkor historians, who fought vehemently for more than half a century for the first interpretation and, thus,

deification of the Angkor kings.[31] However, research since the late sixtieth of the last century confirmed instead the second interpretation, that the Devarāja cult was a cult of Śiva as "King of Gods" and tutelary deity of Angkor,[32] most likely worshipped in a bronze image of Śiva.[33] The Devarāja was, therefore, not identical with the central *liṅgam* on top of the temple-mountains. *Yaśodheśvara,* the *liṅgam* and central deity of the Bakeng, has instead to be understood as "Lord [Śiva] of Yaśodhavarman." Only after his death did Yaśodhavarman enter the world (*loka*) of Śiva and was posthumously deified by his name *Paramaśivaloka.*

The Brahmanical state ideology of Angkor passed through several stages of development which gradually brought the ruling kings closer to divinity. As time does not permit scrutiny of this development in detail, its culmination under Udayādityavarman II (1050-66) will be highlighted. In the famous Lovek inscription, we find clear epigraphic evidence on the cosmographical significance of his new Baphuon temple and the function of its royal *liṅgam* in the state cult of Angkor.[34] We learn that Udayādityavarman erected the *suvarṇādri* or "golden mountain" (the Baphuon) in his own city, vying with the abode of the gods, the golden Mount Meru, standing in the middle of Jambudvīpa. On the summit of this golden mountain, he consecrated the *suvarṇaliṅga* in a temple resplendent with divine radiance. A victorious general sought permission to donate his spoils of war to the golden *liṅgam* of the golden mountain, which harboured, in itself, the "subtle inner self" (*sūkṣma-antara-ātman*) of Udayādityavarman.[35] Here, in a few lines, we find the very essence of the apotheosis of the ruler in eleventh-century Angkor. The "subtle inner self" of the king dwells in a *liṅgam* which he consecrated in the course of his reign on a temple-mountain as a symbol of fecundity and strength. As the kings of Angkor are also exalted as a portion (*aṃśa*) of Śiva, it appears that this "portion" and the "subtle inner self" of the king are one and the same. Hence, the God Śiva and the king of Angkor were united in a *liṅgam* upon the topmost step of a temple pyramid, which constituted the ritual centre of the Angkorian kingdom and represented the microcosmic replica of Mount Meru, the abode of the gods. Despite this ritual unification of the ruling kings of Angkor with Śiva, they were neither god nor Śiva himself during their lifetime. The Khmer portions of the inscriptions clearly distinguish between *kamraten jagat ta rāja*, the "Lord of the World [who is] the King," the equivalent of Śiva as Devarāja, and *kamraten phdai karom*, the "Lord of the Earth," the ruling king of Angkor.[36] Only after their death did they enter Śiva's divine abode (*pada*) or world (*loka*), as known from their posthumous names.

In order to estimate Jayavarman VII's new and revolutionary quest for divine Buddhahood during his lifetime, it is necessary to also have a short look at the decline of the Devarāja cult in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

Sūryavarman I, the first truly imperial king of Angkor in the first half of the eleventh century, was a Buddhist, as known from his posthumous name *Nirvāṇapada*. The recovery and culmination of the Devarāja state cult under his successor, Udayādityavarman, was, in fact its "swan song." After his Baphuon, no further royal temple-mountains were erected for the royal *liṅga*s at Angkor. Instead, Angkor's next imperial king, Sūryavarman II, dedicated Angkor Wat, the world's greatest sacred monument, to the Hindu god, Viṣṇu, and received the posthumous name *Paramaviṣṇuloka*. Sūryavarman was succeeded in *ca.* 1150 by his cousin, Dharaṇīndravarman II, who, too, was an ardent Buddhist. His son was the great Jayavarman VII. In view of the decline of the Śaivite state cult of Angkor, Jayavarman VII rightly proclaimed, allegorically, in one of his inscriptions that the mountain of Śiva in the Himayala and, thus, also his temple mountain(s) in Angkor, was uprooted (*unmūlita*).[37]

Due to internal revolts and the rule of two usurpers, Jayavarman was unable to ascend the throne immediately after the death of his father. He had to wait until a disastrous raid on Angkor in 1177 by an army of Champa, during which the usurper was killed and Angkor devastated. It took four more years after the final defeat of Champa before Jayavarman was crowned. During his eventful and martial rule until *ca.* 1220, Cambodia underwent its greatest expansion.

With regard to Buddhist influence on Jayavarman's policy and state ideology, the most deserving aspect is, undoubtedly, his meritorious construction of 102 hospitals and 123 rest houses all over the state for the use of pilgrims. In an inscription, Jayavarman proclaims that "he suffered from the maladies of his subjects more than from his own; for it is the public grief which makes the grief of kings, not their own grief,"[38] a statement which reminds us of Aśoka's *dhamma* ethics. A particularly fascinating aspect of Jayavarman's "social policy" is the uniform foundation stelae of these hospitals, and the amazingly detailed lists of their personnel and provisions.[39] The personnel housed in each hospital consisted of 36 persons beginning with two doctors, assisted by a man and two women, two store-keepers, two cooks, 14 hospital attendants, etc. The detailed lists of food provisions, provided thrice a year with quantities exactly stated, read like accounts of flourishing groceries. The expenditure for the four large hospitals attached to Angkor exceeded that of all hospitals in the countryside. They annually consumed 11,192 tons of rice produced by 838 villages with a population of 81,640 people. They were provided with 2,124 kg of sesame, 105 kg of cardamom, 2,124 nutmegs, etc.

Equally fascinating are the consecration stelae of Jayavarman's two vast temple complexes of Ta Prohm and Preah Khan with their detailed lists of personnel and the landed property required for their services. Ta Prohm, dedicated to Jayavarman's mother, owned 3,140 villages with 79,365 people

of whom eighteen were great priests, 2,740 officiates, 2,202 assistants and 615 were dancers.[40] Preah Khan, with its 430 images and dedicated to Jayavarman's father, owned 5,324 villages with 97,840 people.

The most dramatic change in Angkor's ritual policy was caused by Jayavarman's incredible building project as a unique manifestation of his Buddhist religion and state ideology. After the final defeat of the Chams, he built his new capital in the vast urban space of Angkor. Angkor Thom, the "Great Town" of approximately 3 by 3 km was protected by massive walls of about 6 m height and surrounded by a moat of 100 m width. Its cosmographic iconography combines, in a most ingenious and unique way, Puranic Hindu mythology with Brahmanical *Śilpaśāstra* town-planning. The truly monumental Bayon, which Claude Jacques calls "one of the most enigmatic and powerful religious constructions of the world,"[41] was superimposed right in the centre of Angkor Thom's temple-mountains. It represents the Mahāyāna Buddhist Mount Meru, consisting of 37 still-existing towers, all of them equipped with the world-famous Buddha faces on their four cardinal points, which strongly resemble with Jayavarman's portrait sculptures.

However, it is not the Bayon alone which symbolises in Angkor (and Southeast Asia) a hitherto unknown manifestation of the ritual deification of a ruler during his lifetime. During the first decade of his rule, Jayavarman had the two temple complexes constructed outside the walled city, the Ta Prohm in 1186 and the Preah Khan in 1191. They are nearly as impressive as the Bayon and were dedicated to his deceased parents. Ta Prohm sheltered the image of the queen mother as Prajñāpāramitā and Preah Khan his father's image as Lokeśvara. These divinitirs are the most highly venerated bodhisattvas in Southeast Asian Mahāyāna Buddhism and form, together with the Buddha, its great trinity. Coedès asked the interesting question that if Ta Prohm sheltered the king's mother as Prajñāpāramitā and Preah Khan his father's image in the guise of Lokeśvara, "where was the image of Buddha which was normally placed between the two?" And he very convincingly conjectured that

> very probably this third image was in the Bayon, the central temple of the city of Angkor where the [already mentioned] giant statue of Buddha was found. . . . Thus, they created on a kilometric scale, appropriate to a great king, this triad which heretofore had only been produced in small sculptures. . . . We can hardly doubt that Jayavarman VII looked on himself as a living Buddha.[42]

This assumption is further verified by the 23 portrait-statues of Jayavarman which were consecrated by the name Jayabuddhamahānātha.[43] The compound *Buddha-mahānātha* (Buddha, the Great Protector) prefixed by Jaya, the abbreviation of Jayavarman's name, makes it very likely that this name has to be understood as "The Buddha Jayavarman, the Great Protector." Coedès, therefore, concluded that the consecration of Jayavarman's portrait-statues as Jayabuddhamahānātha in 23 cities, "most of which were on the outer edges

of the kingdom, proclaimed both the political authority of the king and his religious dominance."[44] Jayavarman's new "Buddhist policy," impressive "government health policy" (Coedès) and state ideology, thus, seems to have been well-established.

If we try to make out possible causes of their discontinuity after Jayavarman's death, we may have to distinguish between several, admittedly conjectural, reasons. The already cited reaction under his successors, particularly the anti-Buddhist iconoclasm under Jayavarman VIII, seems to have been the handiwork of members of the court elite. Jayavarman VII's quest for Buddhahood and his new Devarāja cult of royal deification in Buddhist disguise must have particularly antagonised the powerful Brahmins. His "temple policy" may also have been resisted by members of the elite for another reason. As we have just seen in the cases of Ta Prohm and Preah Khan (and one could also mention Beng Mealea and Banteay Chmar, the two equally great temples outside Angkor), his new monumental temple complexes accumulated vast landed property under the direct control of his family, most likely at the cost of the vested interests of members of the traditional elites. Politically, all these activities, whether intended or unintended, inevitably strengthened royal centralism to a hitherto unknown degree, a development which must have particularly affected the elites of the outlying provinces.

However, in the long run, of much greater significance than the reactions of these antagonised traditional elites seems to have been the reaction of the people. They were exhausted and impoverished by endless wars with Champa and by Jayavarman's megalomania;[45] he made them build nearly half of the great monuments of Cambodia by forced labour for his own glorification. Having covered his kingdom with a network of temples, statues of gods and hospitals in a frenzy of missionary zeal, he expressed his compassion for the suffering humanity in the moving language of his inscriptions. But his words could no longer reach a people afflicted by wars and compulsory labour. Exhausted by the burden which Jayavarman's Buddhist apotheosis placed upon them, they turned to Theravāda Buddhism, which spread from Sri Lanka across Burma to Cambodia from the end of the twelfth century.

After this rather detailed depiction of the greatness and posthumous failure of the two greatest Buddhist rulers of India and Southeast Asia, we may now turn briefly to other states and dynasties in these two areas which had come under strong Buddhist influence. In north India, one has to mention, for instance, the Kuṣāṇas with their great Buddhist king, Kaniṣka, and, particularly, the Guptas and Vākāṭakas whose age is famed for the creation of the world heritage Ajantā frescoes, as well as the final creation of the classic statues of the Buddha at Mathura and Sarnath, which became the major icons of Buddhism all over Asia. Further to the east were the Pālas of Bihar and Bengal, known as royal patrons of Nālandā, the greatest monastery of the Buddhist

world, and famous for the Pāla art which deeply influenced Buddhist art in Java. In central and south India, the Sātavāhanas and Ikṣvākus deserve special mention as we owe the masterpieces of early Buddhist art at Sanchi, Amarāvatī and Nāgārjunakoṇḍa to them. Among the countries and dynasties of Southeast Asia before the spread of Sri Lankan Theravāda Buddhism, particular reference has to be made to Dvāravatī in central Thailand, Srivijaya in Sumatra and, last but not the least, the Śailendras of Java, the builders of the world-famous Borobudur.

Looking at this imposing list and keeping in mind our concern about the relationship between Buddhism and the state in India and Southeast Asia, we are confronted by its peculiar nature. In India, none of the above-mentioned states or dynasties can be regarded as Buddhist, although all of them provided a congenial environment for a flourishing Buddhist community by donations to monasteries and the creation of Buddhist art. The Gupta kings were strong devotees of Hindu gods and Samudragupta, the founder of their imperial greatness, performed an *aśvamedha*, the grand Vedic horse sacrifice. The same is known about the founder of the Ikṣvākus and the great Sātavāhana king, Gautamīputra, is described as a "peerless Brahmana" (*ekabamhana* in Prakrit).[46] In Orissa, several kings and ruling queens of the Bhauma-Kara dynasty bear the Buddhist name *saugata* in their royal titles and Buddhist art and architecture flourished in Orissa during their rule. However, from their twenty-five inscriptions, only two report land donations to Buddhist monasteries and monks whereas the rest contains donations to Brahmins and Hindu temples. Even the Pālas, who are usually termed as the last Buddhist dynasty of India, are no real exception to this rule. Although all of their great rulers are also known as *saugatas* from their inscriptions, these are nearly exclusively about land donations to Brahmins.

The symbiosis between Buddhism and trading communities and the flourishing maritime trade in the Bay of Bengal brought Southeast Asia into contact with Buddhism around the beginning of the Christian era. As known particularly from the reports of Chinese Buddhist monks, several countries of Southeast Asia became important centres of Buddhism and intermediate stations between centres of Buddhist learning in China and India in the following centuries. From a passage in *History of the Liang* we know, for instance, that

> a Chinese embassy was sent to Funan between 535 and 545 to ask the king to collect Buddhist texts and to invite him to send Buddhist teachers to China. The king of Funan chose Guṇaratna of Ujjaini, who was then living in Funan, for this mission. He arrived in 546 in China, bringing 240 bundles of texts with him.[47]

From the fact that such a great Buddhist monk and scholar like Guṇaratna of Ujjain stayed in Funan and that he was able to take so many Buddhist

manuscripts with him to the Chinese court, one can easily surmise the greatness of Funan as a genuine centre of Buddhism. But from what we just heard about Hindu kings in India patronising Buddhism, we may not be surprised if the Funan kings, too, were devoted adherents of Hindu deities. The report of I-tsing who spent several years in Srivijaya in Sumatra in the late seventh century to translate Buddhist texts is also well known. He expressly advised Chinese monks proceeding to India to break their journey in Srivijaya, where 1,000 Buddhist monks lived by the rules prevailing in India. In Palembang, the capital of Srivijaya, and its neighbourhood, excellent Buddhist stone and bronze sculptures attest the importance of Buddhism in Srivijaya. However, the famous Malay inscriptions of Jayanasa, I-tsing's contemporary and the king of Srivijaya, are, apart from a reference to an apparent Buddhist park, Śrīkṣetra, completely silent about Buddhism.[48]

A special case is definitely the Śailendra dynasty of Java. Under their rule and patronage, the world-famous Borobudur and various other masterpieces of Buddhist art and architecture (e.g. the nearby Candi Mendut) were built in central Java. Their inscriptions leave no doubt about their strict adherence to Buddhism. However, soon after their completion of Borobudur, they were driven out of Java by the Mataram dynasty, who then built Java's greatest Hindu temples at Prambanam in the same region. We may, therefore, not be unjustified in asking whether the expulsion of the Śailendras was really caused only by a mere dynastic struggle, as usually surmised,[49] or whether it also had something to do with an inherent feature or even failure of what one may call a Buddhist state ideology.

We may now try to arrive at some tentative conclusions about the relationship between Buddhism and the state in India and pre-Theravāda Buddhist Southeast Asia. A major problem seems to be how to correlate our two seemingly different or even contradictory findings: the many cases of flourishing Buddhism under predominantly or even definitely non-Buddhist or Hindu dynasties, on the one hand, and the only temporarily existing powerful Buddhist state ideologies under Aśoka and Jayavarman VII, on the other. Even if we try to avoid an undue essentialisation of Buddhism and Hinduism, the different fate of Buddhism under the two great Buddhist emperors, Indian and Cambodian, on the one hand and under Hindu rulers on the other is, nevertheless, remarkable. Buddhism with its universal and translocal ethics obviously provided an additional, welcome enrichment and cultural extension for a Brahmanically-dominated state ideology and caste-ridden society. If Sheldon Pollock is right to claim a cosmopolitan status for Sanskrit in his controversial paper, Buddhism can certainly claim the same status. As a powerful medium of trans-acculturation, Buddhism enriched what he calls the "aesthetics of politics."[50]

A major incentive provided by Buddhism to Hindu rulers in early India

was certainly to gain the cooperation of trading communities who were operating within the translocal and even international networks of the Buddhist *saṅgha*. An inscription of the south Indian monastery of Nāgārjunakoṇḍa gives evidence of these subcontinental and international relations, which were normally out of the reach of small and medium-sized kingdoms. It mentions Kashmir, Gandhara and the Yavanas (Greeks) in northwest India, the Kirātas in the Himalayas, Vanavāsī in the west, and Toshali and Vaṅga (Orissa and Bengal) in the east, as well as Tāmrapāṇi (Sri Lanka) and even China. One reason as to why Buddhism lost its attraction for the rulers and merchants of early medieval south India might have been the rise of great guilds of Hindu merchants there like the Ayyavole and Manigrāmam, who had their own international networks.[51]

In the predominantly Hindu environment of early and early medieval India and Southeast Asia, Buddhism not only flourished but was also patronised by non-Buddhist rulers for their own vested interests. Yet wherever we come across this situation, we also observe a kind of political abstinence by the Buddhist leaders, as exemplified by Buddha who advised kings but never interfered in their political decisions. Admittedly, Buddhist philosophy enriched Indian political philosophy with concepts like the righteous (*dhārmika*) *cakravartin* or the "Great Elect." However, as far as it is possible to detect political reality in contemporary literary sources and inscriptions, I am unable to trace Buddhist influence in the inscriptions of Hindu kings who patronised Buddhist institutions in their kingdoms. Two great exceptions were Aśoka and Jayavarman VII. A major reason as to why their grand vision of a genuine Buddhist state ideology did not outlive them seems to have been not so much their contravention of the Buddhist tradition of political restraint but more that both put into action another Buddhist ideal, the ideological quest for a universal mission. While the missionary work of Buddhist *bhikkhus* was socially acceptable even in non-Buddhist societies,[52] Aśoka's and Jayavarman's quest for a universal mission, implemented with their imperial influence and power, appears in a very different light. What might have further aggravated the situation was the missionary frenzy of Aśoka's "Dhamma obsession" and Jayavarman's "architectural megalomania" of self-aggrandisement. It was the social unbearableness of their visions and their ideological overstretch based upon a hitherto unknown centralism which caused their decline.

However, Buddhism continued in India after Aśoka through its fruitful symbiosis with Hinduism for more than a millennium. It re-emerged after Jayavarman VII as Theravāda Buddhism in mainland Southeast Asia as a genuine state ideology and folk religion, a status which was denied both to Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna Buddhism in Brahmin-dominated India. Or would it be more correct to say a status which Buddhism never aimed at in India?[53]

NOTES

* I am thankful to Prof. Romila Thapar and Prof. Richard Gombrich for their helpful comments on an earlier version of this paper.

1. Thapar, *Early India from the Origins to AD 1300*, p. 210; Singh, *A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India*, p. 366.
2. Briggs, *The Ancient Khmer Empire*, p. 239.
3. Jacques and Freeman, *Ancient Angkor*, p. 83.
4. Trautmann, *Kauṭilīya and the Arthaśāstra.*
5. Hultzsch, *Inscriptions of Aśoka*, pp. 68-69 (Shahbazgarhi version).
6. Hultzsch, *Inscriptions of Aśoka*, p. 167 (1st Minor Rock Edict, Pupnath version).
7. Falk, *Aśokan Sites and Artefacts.*
8. That Aśoka carried out his moral teaching very seriously is known from Khāravela's famous Hāthīgumphā inscription not far from Aśoka's Dhauli Major Rock Edicts. About two hundred years after Aśoka's death Khāravela proudly announced in this record that he had revived dance and music performances (*tauryatrika*) which had been suspended in the time of the Mauryas (*muriyakāla*). See Sahu, *Kharavela*, p. 345. For a different reading see Sircar, *Select Inscriptions*, vol. I, p. 218.
9. Thapar, *Aśoka and the Decline of the Mauryas*, pp. 40-41.
10. Thapar doubts the degree to which Aśoka's policies were responsible for the spread of Buddhism in post-Mauryan times. "It was linked more to traders and artisans and small-scale landowners supporting it during that period. Sources from Central Asia, West Asia and Southeast Asia do not mention the Buddhist missions sent by Aśoka but, in contrast, Sri Lanka makes much of this. There are no references to him in these areas other than in Buddhist religious texts. The Chinese pilgrims refer to him only when they are travelling within India" (personal communication).
11. Hultzsch, *Inscriptions of Aśoka*, p. 33 (5th Major Rock Edict, Khalsi version).
12. Hultzsch, *Inscriptions of Aśoka.*
13. See particularly Gombrich, *Theravada Buddhism*, pp. 127-36.
14. Hultzsch, *Inscriptions of Aśoka*, p. 13 (6th MRE, Girnar version).
15. Hultzsch, *Inscriptions of Aśoka*, p. 19 (11th MRE, Girnar version).
16. Hultzsch, *Inscriptions of Aśoka*, p. 117 (2nd separate MRE, Jaugada version).
17. Hultzsch, *Inscriptions of Aśoka*, p. 69 (13th MRE, Shahbazgarhi version).
18. According to Thapar, "The only people from whom he could expect trouble were the frontier tribes. They may well have harassed his administrators and with them he used great firmness." See Thapar, *Aśoka and the Decline of the Mauryas*, p. 203.
19. H. Falk, *Aśokan Sites and Artefacts.*
20. Fussman, "Central and Provincial Administration in Ancient India," pp. 43-78.
21. Hultzsch, *Inscriptions of Aśoka*, pp. 11-12 (6th MRE, Girnar version).
22. For the so-called sixth "caste" *episcopoi* by Diodorus and *ephoroi* by Strabo and Arrian see Thapar, *Aśoka and the Decline of the Mauryas*, p. 111 and Thapar, *The Mauryas Revisited*, see particularly chapter II, "Megasthenes: Text and Context," pp. 32-60.
23. Basham, *The Wonder That Was India*, p. 55.
24. Personal communication.
25. Hultzsch, *Inscriptions of Aśoka*, pp. 160-61.
26. Hultzsch, *Inscriptions of Aśoka*, pp. 173-74.
27. Hultzsch, *Inscriptions of Aśoka*, p. 8 (4th edict, Girnar version).
28. Thapar, *The Mauryas Revisited*, p. 24.

29. Thapar, *Cultural Pasts*, p. 876.
30. Thapar, *A History of India*, p. 88; Singh, *A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India*, p. 354.
31. Coedès, "La divinisation de la royauté divinisée," pp. 1-23; Coedès, *Angkor*.
32. Filliozat, "New Researches on the Relation between India and Cambodia," pp. 527-54; Mabbett, "Devarāja," pp. 202-23; Woodward, "Practice and Belief in Ancient Cambodia," pp. 249-61.
33. Kulke, *The Devarāja Cult*, pp. 24ff.
34. Majumdar, *Inscriptions of Kambuja*, p. 424.
35. Majumdar, *Inscriptions of Kambuja*, p. 398 (Prah Nok Stele Inscription, verse 159).
36. Kulke, *Devarāja*, p. 23.
37. Inscription of Prasat Chrun, Angkor Thom K.288, verse 37, *Inscriptions du Cambodge*, vol. 4, p. 212.
38. Coedès, "La stele de Ta Prohm," pp. 44-81; Briggs, *Ancient Khmer Empire*, p. 233.
39. Coedès, "Etudes cambodgiennes, 34," pp. 344-47; Finot, "l'Inscription Sanskrit de Say-Fong," pp. 18-33.
40. Coedès, "La stele de Ta Prohm," verses 53-82.
41. Jacques and Freeman, *Ancient Angkor*, p. 78.
42. Coedès, *Angkor*, pp. 97-98.
43. Woodward, "The Jayabuddhamahanatha Images of Cambodia," pp. 105-11.
44. Coedès, *Angkor*, p. 100.
45. Briggs, *Ancient Khmer Empire*, p. 236; see also Coedès' scathing judgement on Jayavarman's religious zeal in *Un grand roi du Cambodge*.
46. Singh, *A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India*, p. 383.
47. Coedès, *The Indianized States of Southeast Asia*, p. 60.
48. Kulke, "Kadatuan Srivijaya," pp. 159-80.
49. Coedès, *Indianized States of Southeast Asia*, pp. 108-09.
50. Pollock, "The Sanskrit Cosmopolis, 300-1300," pp. 197-247.
51. Abraham, *Two Medieval Merchant Guilds of South India*; Karashima, "South Indian Merchant Guilds in the Indian Ocean and Southeast Asia," pp. 135-57.
52. Bailey and Mabbett emphasise the important mediatory role of the *bhikkhus* in their work. See their *The Sociology of Early Buddhism*.
53. Gombrich commented on an earlier version of this paper: "I entirely agree with your conclusion, though I might be tempted to put it more strongly. In my view, Buddhism had no state ideology. If there is one, why is there no text about it? On the other hand, why do we expect it to have one? Could it not be that we still think of all religions as somehow needing to conform to the model of Christianity? [. . .] The Buddha taught morality for the individual. He did build an institution, but it was the Sangha; about lay institutions I believe he had nothing whatever to say, since they lay outside his sphere of influence" (personal communication).

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