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# ***Vihāras* in Ancient Cambodia as Evidenced in Inscriptions**

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**Abstract:** This paper attempts to define a *vihāra* “monastery” in the premodern Cambodian context on the basis of existing epigraphical data and archaeological findings. After analyzing about twenty inscriptions which mention the term *vihāra* (dated 7th–14th centuries CE and composed in Old Khmer, Sanskrit and Pali), it discusses the physical aspects of the *vihāras*, with references to two sites of monasteries which have relatively rich archaeological remains; viz., the Royal Monastery (present-day Ta Prohm temple, Siem Reap province) and the *vihāra* at Prey Svay (Sukhothai province, Thailand). The paper also examines the operational aspects of the *vihāras* by focusing on their three functions: place of dwelling, place of learning and place of worship.

**Keywords:** *vihāra*, monastery, Buddhism, inscriptions, ancient Cambodia, physical aspects, functions.

## **1. Introduction**

The landscape of ancient Cambodia (6th–14th centuries CE) was marked by hundreds of religious buildings some of which were identified with several terms of Sanskrit origin, from the stone inscriptions which have been discovered at the sites where the buildings stood. The terms connote either “abode or dwelling place,” viz., *āyatana*, *ālaya*, *āvāsa*, *āśrama*, *nivāsa* and *vihāra*;<sup>1</sup> or “place,” viz. *pada*; or “park or monastic complex,” viz. *ārāma*;<sup>2</sup> or “hall,” viz. *śālā*; or “city,” viz.

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<sup>1</sup> Any combination of these terms has not been found in Cambodian inscriptions; unlike some inscriptions of South Asia which attest the combination of two terms *āśrama-vihāra* to refer to a Buddhist monastery (see Johannes Bronkhorst, *Buddhism in the Shadow of Brahmanism* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2011), 96, n. 196 and 97, n. 199).

<sup>2</sup> The term *ārāma* requires further research: while it refers to a monastic complex, such as in the expression *vamśārāma* (see p. 235), it appears in ambiguous con-

*pura*; or “cave,” viz. *guhā*. They refer to either Buddhist or Brahmanical institutions; the religious affiliation can be often told by the names of the buildings. The reign of King Yaśovarman (889–c. 915 CE), for example, is known for the establishment of 100 *āśramas* “hermitage.”<sup>3</sup> To date, twenty of these *āśramas* can be identified through inscriptions found at their respective sites. Four among them are situated in the ancient capital city, known as Yaśodharapura at that time. They are named with respect to their religious affiliations, viz., Vaiṣṇavāśrama (*āśrama* of the devotees of Viṣṇu, K. 701),<sup>4</sup> Saugatāśrama (*āśrama* of the Buddhists, K. 290),<sup>5</sup> Māheśvarāśrama (*āśrama* of the devotees of Śiva, K. 1228) and Brāhmaṇāśrama (*āśrama* of the Brahmins, K. 279).<sup>6</sup> Similarly, Bhadreśvaranivāsa (K. 933/ 1014 CE), Rudrāvāsa (K. 19/ 964 CE) and Yogīśvarālaya (K. 212/ 1027 CE) are identified as belonging to Śiva because of the Śaiva epithets, viz. Bhadreśvara, Rudra and Yogīśvara. However, the religious affiliation of some foundations which did not have a name could be identified by their inscriptions’ content. For example, the 102 hospitals (*ārogyasālā*) of King Jayavarman VII (1181–c. 1218 CE) were Buddhist because their inscriptions record the worship of the Buddha, Master of medicine (Bhaiṣajyaguru). The hospitals were managed by a Buddhist foundation called Rājavihāra “Royal Monastery” (see pp. 245–247).

The term *vihāra* “monastery,” is found in twenty inscriptions which are dated between the 7th and the 14th centuries CE. The dates

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texts such as *kāmyārāma* in the inscriptions K. 904 (718 CE) and K. 420 (10th – 11th centuries CE).

<sup>3</sup> For a discussion on the types and functions of the *āśramas*, see Saveros Pou, “Āśrama dans l’ancien Cambodge,” *Journal Asiatique* 290/1 (2002): 319–343, and see Julia Estève and Dominique Soutif, “Les Yaśodharāśrama, marqueurs d’empire et bornes sacrées : conformité et spécificité des stèles digraphiques khmères de la région de Vat Phu,” *Bulletin de l’École française d’Extrême-Orient* 97–98 (2010–2011): 331–355 for a recent study on the localization of the *āśramas*.

<sup>4</sup> Cambodian inscriptions are referred to either with their provenance and/or their “K number.” The K-number inventory system was created by George Cœdès in the early 20th century. The letter “K” stands for Khmer as opposed to “C” standing for Campā. The Cambodian inscriptions are found in the present-day Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam. An updated inventory of the Cambodian inscriptions is available at: <https://cik.efeo.fr/>.

<sup>5</sup> Saugata “Buddhist” is a derivation from the term Sugata, an epithet of the Buddha.

<sup>6</sup> The four *āśramas* are identified with the temple of Southern Komnap, temple of Ong Mong, temple of Northern Komnap, and temple of Prei Prasat, respectively.

conform to the main events of Buddhism in Cambodia.<sup>7</sup> Although it is not known when Buddhism first arrived in Cambodia, the archaeological findings, inscriptions, and Chinese sources suggest the existence of Buddhism in Cambodia at least as early as the 5th–6th centuries CE. There are references to forms of Buddhism like Mahāyāna and Śrāvākayāna,<sup>8</sup> with evidence for the presence of the Theravāda, Saṃmitīya and Mūlasarvāstivāda monastic orders.<sup>9</sup> Some inscriptions of the 7th and 8th centuries record pious donations to the Buddhist institutions and congregations. Numerous Buddha statues of the early 7th century were discovered.

Inscriptional sources from the Angkor period, especially from the 9th–11th centuries CE, refer only to the Mahāyāna form of Buddhism. Most of the Angkor kings were Śaiva devotees but patronized Buddhists. In the middle of the 10th century CE, Mahāyāna Buddhism which was already present in Cambodia from the 5th–6th centuries onwards, adopted some esoteric ritual, as is clearly evidenced in K. 111 from Vat Sithor (see further below). In the 12th century CE, at the peak of Khmer civilization, King Jayavarman VII (1181–c. 1218 CE) made Mahāyāna Buddhism the state religion of the kingdom. Two circumstances suggest that at the same time Theravāda Buddhism may also have been practiced in the Khmer kingdom, viz., (1) the similarity between the plan of the 12th-century Sasar Sdam temple (in Angkor region) enclosing a sandstone stupa and the traditional architecture of

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<sup>7</sup> The following brief history of Buddhism in ancient Cambodia is very much simplified. For further details, see for instance Nandana Chutiwongs, *The Iconography of Avalokiteśvara in Mainland South East Asia* (New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Center for the Arts and Aryan Books International, 2002), 211–217; and Ian Harris, *Cambodian Buddhism: History and Practice* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005), 1–5.

<sup>8</sup> Śrāvākayāna means literally “vehicle of the listeners.” Historically, it was the most common term used by Mahāyāna Buddhist texts to describe one hypothetical path to enlightenment.

<sup>9</sup> For a discussion of the term *theravāda* with regards to other Buddhist lineages, see Anālayo, “A Note on the Term Theravāda,” *Buddhist Studies Review* 30, no. 2 (2013): 215–235 and Peter Skilling, “Theravāda in History,” *Pacific World: Journal of the Institute of Buddhist Studies* 3, no. 11 (2009): 61–93, and for a discussion on the presence of the Saṃmitīyas in Cambodian inscriptions, see Dominic Goodall and Nicolas Revire, “East and West—New Inscriptions from Funan, Zhenla, and Dvāravati,” *Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient* 107 (2021): 265. Although there is evidence of the transmission of narratives from the scriptures of Mūlasarvāstivādins in Southeast Asia, a synthetic work on the Mūlasarvāstivādin narratives in this region is yet to be done. In the Cambodian context, some references to the monastic code (*vinaya*) of the Mūlasarvāstivādins can be found in the inscription of Vat Sithor, see pp. 261–262.

stupa of Sri Lanka called *cetiyaḡhara* or circular stupa-temple,<sup>10</sup> and (2) standing Buddha images in Cambodia of probably the 12th century and stylistic influences from Theravādic Dvāravatī.<sup>11</sup> In the late 13th century, a Śaiva reaction against Māhāyana Buddhism occurred in Cambodia which resulted in the destruction of Buddhist artefacts in King Jayavarman VII's temples. But in the 14th century, Theravāda Buddhism rose to importance.

In the twenty inscriptions, though the term *vihāra* seems to be used exclusively for Buddhist institutions, it presents some equivocal-ity.<sup>12</sup> It refers mostly to a monastic compound which served as dwelling place and, in some cases, contained one or more image halls. However, some *vihāras* were described as “city” (*purī*) because of their multiple functions. In what follows, we will first attempt to define the

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<sup>10</sup> Senake Bandaranayake, *Sinhalese Monastic Architecture: The Vihāras of Anurādhapura* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1974), 139–140 explains that “the *cetiyaḡhara* (*thūpaḡhara*, or *vaṭadāḡē*, as it is commonly called in Ceylon) is one of the most distinctive architectural forms of the Anurādhapura and Polonnaruva periods. [...] The basic elements of the *cetiyaḡhara* in Ceylon, as they are manifested in the surviving examples, consist of a high platform, usually circular, a small central *stūpa* surrounded by concentric rows of stone pillars and usually four cardinaly oriented entrances.” Chutiwongs (*The Iconography of Avalokiteśvara*, 215, 271) thinks that the four pillars at Sasar Sdam temple are comparable to those of the main *stūpa* of the Vijayotpāya at Gaḡaladeniya which Bandaranayake (*Sinhalese Monastic Architecture*, 152) refuses to call a *cetiyaḡhara* because it has “rather an unusual form of *stūpa* with a high, square base, from which project four image houses. In principle this resembles the multiple image-house and *stūpa*-shrine at Pahārpūr, as it has been conjecturally reconstructed by Prudence Myer. A light roof, resting on four large masonry columns of apparently recent origin, protects the *stūpa*.”

<sup>11</sup> One of the earliest examples is the standing Buddha carving on the lintel of Preah Palilay temple (Angkor). Pierre Dupont, *L'archéologie mōne de Dvāravatī* (Paris: École française d'Extrême-Orient, 1959), 282, dates this temple (including the carvings of its lintels) to the first half of the 12th century. For a discussion of the date of the temple, see Puthpiseth Tun, “Bouddhisme Theravāda et production artistique en pays khmer : Étude d'un corpus d'images en ronde-bosse du Buddha (XIIIe–XIVe siècles).” (PhD diss., Université Paris-Sorbonne, 2015), 66–67.

<sup>12</sup> In Buddhism, the term *vihāra* is commonly used for “a dwelling place for monks and nuns, and thus typically translated as ‘monastery’” (Robert E. Buswell Jr. and Donald S. Lopez Jr., *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*. (Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2014), 968). It often refers to a Buddhist or Jain monastery in Indian epigraphical context (see Johannes Bronkhorst, *How the Brahmins Won: From Alexander to the Guptas*, Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2016), 473f.). However, in ancient Campā, the neighboring state of Cambodia, some Śaiva monasteries were also called *vihāras* (see Griffiths, Pichon & Southworth, this volume).

nature of *vihāra* in the Cambodian context by reviewing the twenty inscriptions, and to analyze the physical aspects of *vihāras* by focusing on two sites which contain rich archeological remains, viz., the Ta Prohm temple (K. 273/ 1186 CE) and Prey Svay (K. 413/ 1361 CE). Finally, we will examine the operational aspects of the *vihāras*, discussing their three possible functions, viz., place of dwelling, place of worship, and place of learning.

## 2. Analysis of the inscriptions containing the term *vihāra*

The number of the inscriptions mentioning the term *vihāra* does not represent the whole number of the Buddhist monasteries to exist in ancient Cambodia because some of them did not leave any inscription, or were recorded in an inscription which has not survived, or were known by terms other than *vihāra*. For instance, one of the most important Buddhist monasteries in Angkorian time was called Vamśārāma “Bamboo Grove” in Sanskrit (equivalent of *veluvana* in Buddhist texts) and Chpār Ransī in Khmer.<sup>13</sup> In this article, we focus only on the monasteries known as *vihāra*. Below are the details of the twenty inscriptions containing the term *vihāra*:<sup>14</sup>

Date in CE	Province	Language	Inventory number
7th century (dated 639)	Sa Kaeo	Khmer + Sanskrit	K. 505
7th century	Nakhon Ratchasima	Khmer + Sanskrit	K. 388

<sup>13</sup> For a description of Vamśārāma, see Julia Estève and Brice Vincent, “L’about inscrit du musée national du Cambodge (K. 943) : nouveaux éléments sur le bouddhisme tantrique à l’époque angkorienne,” *Arts Asiatiques* 65, no. 1 (2010): 149–154. The newly inventoried inscription K. 1297 (private collection in France, 12th century CE) should be added to the list of the inscriptions which mention the names Vamśārāma or Chpār Ransī on p. 149 of the article.

<sup>14</sup> Lately, two inscriptions in Khmer language mentioning the term *vihāra* have been inventoried, viz., K. 1529-1 (12th–13th centuries CE, private collection in Thailand) and K. 1560 (c. 7th century CE, Ta Keo province). K. 1529-1 which is a fragment of a gilded silver ewer, reads: *ta vraḥ rājavihāra* “to the illustrious Royal Monastery.” Although the provenance of this inscription is not known, it is probable that the inscribed ewer was among the metal objects which King Jayavarman VII donated to the Royal Monastery (see p. 246). The second inscription K. 1560 is too fragmentary to get information of the *vihāra* mentioned therein. These inscriptions do not contribute anything substantially new to be incorporated in this article.

Date in CE	Province	Language	Inventory number
7th century	Nakhon Ratchasima	Khmer + Sanskrit	K. 389
7th century	Ta Keo	Khmer	K. 755
7th century	Unknown <sup>15</sup>	Khmer	K. 790
7th century	Ta Keo	Khmer	K. 1266
7th century	An Giang	Khmer + Sanskrit	K. 1426
10th century (dated 953)	Kompong Thom	Khmer + Sanskrit	K. 157
9th–10th centuries	Prey Veng	Khmer + Sanskrit	K. 56
9th–10th centuries	Preah Vihear	Khmer	K. 182-2
10th century (dated c. 968)	Kandal	Sanskrit	K. 111
11th century (dated c. 1010)	Banteay Meanchey	Khmer + Sanskrit	K. 1052
11th century	Ubon Ratchathani	Khmer	K. 370
11th century	Banteay Meanchey	Khmer + Sanskrit	K. 224
12th century (dated 1186)	Siem Reap	Sanskrit	K. 273
12th century (dated 1181 & 1186)	Buriram (and other provinces)	Sanskrit	K. 386+ (see explanation below)
12th century (dated 1191)	Siem Reap	Sanskrit	K. 908
12th century (dated 1195)	Siem Reap	Sanskrit	K. 692
14th century (dated 1308)	Siem Reap	Khmer + Pali	K. 754
14th century (dated 1361)	Sukhothai	Khmer	K. 413

“K. 386+” refers to a group of almost identical inscriptions discovered in King Jayavarman VII’s hospitals. According to the stela of

<sup>15</sup> The inscription may come from Ta Keo province (see p. 241). In the map showing the locations of the inscriptions which mention the term *vihāra* (Figure 1), the inscription K. 790 is indicated in Kandal province, precisely in Phnom Penh (where it is kept now).



Ta Prohm temple (K. 273, 1186 CE), the king has established 102 hospitals along important roads across his kingdom and erected a stela in each of them. To date, twenty-five stelae (dated 1181 and 1186 CE) have been found in various provinces of Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam.<sup>16</sup>

The inscriptions provide different kinds of information about the respective *vihāras*: five of the inscriptions merely hint at the existence of a *vihāra* (K. 157; K. 370; K. 386+; K. 692; K. 790); another five only mention names related to certain *vihāras* (K. 56; K. 182-2; K. 224; K. 908; K. 1052); only ten inscriptions give some more details about the *vihāras* they mention (K. 111; K. 273; K. 388; K. 389; K. 413; K. 505; K. 754; K. 755; K. 1266; K. 1426). Below follows the summary of the contents of the twenty inscriptions in chronological order.

### 3. Seven inscriptions of the 7th century

Three inscriptions have been found in the northern part of the ancient kingdom. K. 505 dated 639 CE and situated at Khao Rang (Sa Kaeo, Thailand) mentions a *vihāra* “monastery” and *vihāra ruṅ* “large monastery.”<sup>17</sup> The Khmer text which follows a Sanskrit stanza that indicates the date, records a large donation by a wealthy man bearing the

<sup>16</sup> The twenty-five stelae are: K. 12 (Ta Keo); K. 160 (Preah Vihear); K. 209 (Battambang); K. 435 and K. 667 (Kompong Thom); K. 537, K. 602, K. 614, K. 955 and K. 1115 (Siem Reap); K. 1402 (Banteay Meanchey); K. 368 (Vientiane, Laos); K. 375 and K. 1524 (Surin, Thailand); K. 386 (Buriram, Thailand); K. 387, K. 395, K. 402 and K. 952 (Nakhon Ratchasima, Thailand); K. 1170 (Khon Kaen, Thailand); K. 1519 and K. 1520 (Roi Et, Thailand); K. 1522 (Si Sa Ket, Thailand); K. 912 (Trà Vinh, Vietnam); K. 1521 (private collection, Japan). Among the inscriptions, K. 386 has been chosen as a representative of the group, because it is in a better state of conservation than most of the other twenty-four.

<sup>17</sup> The last line (line 31) of the inscription which contains the term *vihāra ruṅ* has a lacuna of about eight syllables. In his edition (*Inscriptions du Cambodge*, vol. 5 (Hanoi, Paris: École française d’Extrême-Orient, 1953), 23–24), George Coédès writes: ... *āy vihāra ruṅ* “... at the large monastery.” This line cannot be verified with the EFEO estampage n. 1321 because it has probably been made when the stela had been fixed in a pedestal hiding the last line. Based on the restituted copy of the estampage of the inscription published in George Coédès, “hlāk dī<sup>1</sup> 119 śilā cārīk khṃ nāi prahdeś daiy [119th Plate, Khom Inscription in Thailand].” In *prahjum śilā cārīk bhāg dī<sup>1</sup> 4* [*Collection of Inscriptions. Part 4*] (Bangkok : The Committee on the Publication of Historical Documents, Office of the Prime Minister, OPM, 2513, 1970), 225–228, Vireakput Yeang, *Silācārīk kambujā samāy mun aṅgar bhāg dī 1* [*Pre-Angkorian Inscriptions of Cambodia (vol. 1)*] (2018, manuscript), 140, restitutes the last line as follows:

title Sināhv (possibly named Pragat)<sup>18</sup> to a Buddhist monastery (*vihāra*). The donation consists of servants, plantations of areca- and coconut-palms, metal cult objects and cloth-materials.<sup>19</sup> Another smaller donation was later given by probably another Sināhv who may have been the author of the inscription.<sup>20</sup> There is no clear hint as to whether this Sināhv was the same as the previous one.

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*gi saṃ paribhoga pragat āy vihāra ruṅ*  
 “which was combined to support the large monastery.”

This restitution seems implausible, though, for two grammatical reasons which cannot be explained at length in the scope of this article. We would propose instead the three following phrases: *gui saṃ paribhoga ta vraḥ āy vihāra ruṅ* or *gui saṃ paribhoga ai ta vraḥ āy vihāra ruṅ* or *gui saṃ paribhoga droṅ vraḥ āy vihāra ruṅ* “to combine wealth with the deity at the large monastery.” The term *droṅ* means “including, with, and” which appears with the verb *saṃ paribhoga* “to combine wealth” in several pre-Angkorian inscriptions such as K. 137 (7th century).

<sup>18</sup> According to Jenner, *Dictionary of Pre-Angkorian Khmer*, 521, the term *sināhv* means “hermit, ascetic.” This definition does not seem plausible to us because, in the extant epigraphical sources, a hermit has so far never been known as a donor of such a handsome wealth to a Buddhist institution. Michael Vickery, *Society, Economics, and Politics in Pre-Angkor Cambodia. The 7th–8th Centuries* (Tokyo: The Center for East Asian Cultural Studies for Unesco, the Toyo Bunko, 1998), 130, n. 158, followed by Sotheara Vong, *Silācārīk nai prades kambujā samāy mun aṅgar 1 [Pre-Angkor Inscriptions of Cambodia 1]* (Phnom Penh: Editions Angkor, 2003), 91 understands Sināhv as the name of the donor. Nevertheless, we propose to understand Sināhv as a title of function as suggested by Cœdès, *Inscriptions du Cambodge*, vol. 5, 24. It is possibly of Mon origin and indicates a high-ranking military officer.

<sup>19</sup> The complete list of the donation by Sināhv Pragat to the *vihāra* is as follows:  
 – 32 servants (*kñuṃ*: men, women, children; 3 so-called *caṃdak*) including the 4 guardians (*cmāṃ*) of plantations.

– Plantation (*damrīṅ*) at Tnon: 207 areca trees, 20 coconut trees;

– Plantation (*damrīṅ*) near the *vihāra*: 123 areca trees, 120 coconut trees.

[In] the storehouse of the *vihāra*, 4 bronze (*saṃrit*) ewers, 2 metal trays, 20 *sraḡeḥ* (unidentified cult object), a palanquin (*pallaṅka*), a drum and a drumstick (?), 7 *yau* of rippled? (*jlī*) Uladha cloth, 7 *yau* of Kaṃvār cloth, 27 *yau* of rippled? Kāpaṭa cloth, 12 *yau* of Kṣac cloth, 10 *yau* of Kaṃvār cloth, 1 screen, a tripod object, [precious] stones used in ... (the following part is broken).

– At Carku, one and a half *sanre* of paddy field, 10 pairs(?) of cows, 6 or 7 pairs of buffaloes, (the following part is broken).

<sup>20</sup> The complete list of the donation by Sināhv mentions “myself (*aṅ*),” which was perhaps to be combined with the deity of the Large Monastery (*vihāra ruṅ*), at least 2 couples (of adult persons) and 2 children; at least one metal tray (*thās*), a palanquin, a plantation of ... areca trees, 10 pairs of cows or buffaloes, ... (the following part is broken).

About 120 kilometers to the north of Khao Rang is the site of Hin Kon<sup>21</sup> where two inscriptions, viz., K. 388 and K. 389,<sup>22</sup> have been found on two pillars. K. 388 consists of a text inscribed on the four faces of the pillar composed in Sanskrit and Khmer. The Sanskrit portion opens with the mention that a monk from a royal family Rāja-bhikṣu “king-monk,” alias Nṛpendrādhipativarman before his ordination, established four boundaries (*sīmā*)<sup>23</sup> and donated to the community of monks ten monasteries (*vihāra*) endowed with many Buddha statues and stupas, [paddy] fields and servants as well as two *cīvaras* along with *kaṭhina*.<sup>24</sup> The Khmer portion of the inscription, which is damaged in many places, enumerates the wealth donated by Rāja-bhikṣu, qualified as a preceptor (*upādhyāya*): cult objects made of metal (ewer, incense burner, golden censer, silver censer, [the following passage is lost]), 1 plantation of 20 areca trees, a paddy field measuring 2 *sanre*, 10 pairs of cows, 1 elephant, servants, [the following passage is lost].

Like K. 388, K. 389 is also composed in Sanskrit and Khmer. Although the inscription is heavily damaged, it is likely to mention the same protagonist as K. 388, viz., the preceptor (*upādhyāya*). He was presumably in charge of a “royal monastery” (*rājavihāra*) which may have been the biggest among the ten monasteries mentioned in K. 388.

<sup>21</sup> About forty kilometers south of the Korat plateau.

<sup>22</sup> The two inscriptions are undated but believed to belong to the pre-Angkorian time by their script. However, Vickery, *Society, Economics, and Politics*, 132, argues that they contain some words and names which are to some extent of Angkorian characteristic. We consider them to belong to the 8th century, the transitional period between pre-Angkorian and Angkorian. From the point of view of vocabulary, they differ from the inscriptions in Cambodia proper, i.e., they represent a dialect of Khmer people who lived beyond the Dangrek Mountains and had undergone some Mon influence (e.g., the use of the loanword *kyāk* rather than the Khmer term *vrah*, “deity”).

<sup>23</sup> For a discussion on *sīmā*’s importance and *sīmā*-establishing practice in Cambodian Buddhism, see Satoru Kobayashi, “Regenerating Ancient *Sīmās*: A Study of Buddhist Places of Worship in Rural Cambodia,” and Erik W. Davis “*Sīmās* as Assemblages of Territorial Imagination in Cambodia,” in *Sīmās: Foundations of Buddhist Religion*, eds. Jason A. Carbine and Erik W. Davis (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2022).

<sup>24</sup> The term *cīvara* is “the generic term for the robes worn by Buddhist monks, nuns, female probationers, and male and female novices. [...] Robes were one of the four major requisites (Sanskrit *niśraya*; Pali *nissaya*) of the monks and nuns, along with such basics as a begging bowl and lodging, and were the object of the *Kaṭhina* ceremony in which the monastics were offered cloth for making new sets of robes at the end of each rains’ retreats (*varṣā*).” Buswell and Lopez, *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*, 197.

He donated cult objects, servants, cows, and land to the monastery (*vraḥ*).

Three inscriptions, viz., K. 1426, K. 1266, and K. 755, have been found in the southern region. Discovered in October 2019 in the Oc Eo archaeological site which lies in today's An Giang province of Vietnam,<sup>25</sup> the 7th-century stela K. 1426 is inscribed on two faces: face A in Sanskrit and face B in Khmer. The Sanskrit part consists of seven stanzas. After the praise of the Buddha (who is called Jina here), the text mentions a charter by King Jayavarman I (652–680 CE) for the benefit of a monastery called Candana “sandal” (*śrīcandanavihāra*).<sup>26</sup> The charter declares a festival of the procession of the image of the Buddha on every full moon of the month of Vaiśākha (April–May) and the protection of servants, cattle, gardens, fields, etc. offered with devotion to the monastery. This is one of the earliest mentions of an image of the deity being taken around in a procession in the Cambodian Buddhist context. The Khmer text on face B gives more details of the donations to the Candana Vihāra than the Sanskrit portion, especially about the nature of the servants. Some of the servants belonged originally to other deities; some were a shared resource with other deities, and some were newly donated by people. In the end, the text voices a warning that any transgressor of the king's order as given in the charter will be punished.

Both K. 1266 and K. 755 are from Ta Keo province and written in Khmer. As in the inscriptions of the northern region, the motive here was to record donations. A small stela of nine lines, K. 1266 mentions a monastery (*vihāra*) founded by a certain Ci Et, and a donation to the monastery. The donation consists of about seven servants (men, women, and children) and of some cult objects (*thās* “tray,” and *srageḥ* [unidentified]). K. 755 is a two-line text inscribed on the pedestal of a Buddha statue from Vat Chhneah. The beginning and the end of the inscription are lost. It consists of a list of about twenty servants who were qualified as “servants of deity” (*kñum vraḥ*) and “servants of the monastery” (*kñum vihāra*). Two thirds of the servants were women

<sup>25</sup> The precise context of the discovery of the stela is not known to us. A prospection of the site may help to determine whether the monastery Śrī Candana was located in its vicinity.

<sup>26</sup> The expression *śrīcandanavihāra* can also be understood as “monastery of [a lay man named] Candana.” There was a custom in early Buddhism to name monasteries after the lay people who donated them; see for instance Henry Albery, “Buddhism and Society in the Indic North and Northwest 2nd century BCE–3rd century CE” (PhD diss., Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität, 2020), 511f.

accompanied by their daughters or sons. The term *vrah* “deity” mentioned here might refer to the statue of the Buddha which bears the inscription, and which was probably housed in the monastery.<sup>27</sup>

The inscription K. 790 contains eighteen lines in Khmer and is of unknown provenance. It relates a donation of Poñ Siñ to a deity with the title Kpoñ Kamratāñ Añ. The donation consists of twelve servants and several paddy fields, one of which was located near the road towards a monastery (*vihāra*). Referring to three terms used in the inscription, viz., Poñ (an honorific title), Yajamāna “sacrificer/donor,”<sup>28</sup> and Kpoñ (a honorific title for female deity), Vickery suggests that the inscription is from Ta Keo province like K. 1266 and K. 755.<sup>29</sup> If this hypothesis is right, the monastery mentioned here may be either the one sponsored by Ci Et of K. 1266, or the one mentioned in K. 755 on the pedestal of a Buddha-statue (if at all they were two different monasteries).

#### 4. Thirteen inscriptions of the 10th–14th centuries

With Śaivism being the dominant religion of the kingdom of Angkor, the Angkorian landscape was filled with Śaiva temples, leaving relatively insignificant space for Buddhist monasteries. There are only thirteen inscriptions of the 10th–14th centuries CE that mention the term *vihāra*. All these inscriptions, except K. 111 of Vat Sithor, are from the northern region, around the capital city of Angkor Thom. We will discuss below the concentration of the inscriptions in our corpus.

The inscription K. 157 of Vat Kdei Char (Kompong Thom province), a stela composed both in Sanskrit and Old Khmer records the meritorious deeds of a Buddhist courtier of King Harṣavarman (942–944 CE) named Virendravikhyāta. He established an image of Lokeśa in a newly established village given to him by the king. His niece, Kontī, was married to Kavīndrārimathana, an important courtier of King Rājendrarvarman II (944–968 CE), and a devout Buddhist. By the merit of Virendravikhyāta’s devotion to the king,<sup>30</sup> King Rājendrarvarman II offered him a bronze image of Lokeśvara and a goddess,

<sup>27</sup> Like the Khmer word *vrah*, the Javanese term *bhaṭāra* seems to be used to refer to “deity” or “Lord.” See Griffiths, this volume.

<sup>28</sup> The term *yajamāna* in the pre-Angkorian corpus appears in a non-Buddhist context, either Śaiva, Vaiṣṇava or of local cult. Its origin is from Vedic religion where it refers to the “organizer” and beneficiary of the sacrifice—and not to the sacrificial priest.

<sup>29</sup> Vickery, *Society, Economics, and Politics*, 107.

<sup>30</sup> The text is not completely clear about the identity; it may also refer to Kavīndrārimathana. Nevertheless, we follow here the more common interpretation.

probably Prajñāpāramitā.<sup>31</sup> In 953 CE, Virendravikhyāta installed the two images of Avalokiteśvara (Lokeśa and Lokeśvara as mentioned in the inscription) and an image of Prajñāpāramitā in a sanctuary (*prāsāda*). He donated the images of the powerful gods (*devam maharddhikam*) together with lands, gardens and a cluster of villages (*deśam*) to his niece Kontī.<sup>32</sup> The *vihāra* is mentioned in connection to a *kṣetra* (“field”), which the courtier gave to his niece: *jeṅaran-kṣetram vihārañ ca* “the Jeṅ Aran field and the monastery.”<sup>33</sup> Apparently, the monastery was located in the Jeṅ Aran field and its ownership could be transferred from one lay person to another. As the information we receive about Virendravikhyāta, the original proprietor of the monastery, suggests that he was in favor of Mahāyāna Buddhism, the monastery was most probably Mahāyanist.

<sup>31</sup> We agree with Philip Green, “The Vat Sithor Inscription: Translation, Commentary, and Reflections on Buddhist Traditions in Tenth-Century Cambodia” (PhD diss., University of Florida, 2014), 133–134 that the number of the images to be installed by Virendravikhyāta was three, while Julia Estève, “Étude critique des phénomènes de syncrétisme religieux dans le Cambodge angkorien” (PhD diss., École Pratique des Hautes Études, 2009), 392, n. 256, following George Cœdès, *Inscriptions du Cambodge*, vol. 6 (Hanoi, Paris: École française d’Extrême-Orient, 1954), 127, n. 2, cannot decide whether it was two or three. However, the use of the term *arccām* (accusative singular) in the stanza XIII of the inscription, suggests that the bronze image of Lokeśvara was probably attached to the image of Prajñāpāramitā; hence, it could have been considered as one single image.

<sup>32</sup> The verse XIX of the inscription in Cœdès’ edition (*Inscriptions du Cambodge*, vol. 6, reads:

*sabhūmy-ārāma-hāsādi-deśan devam maharddhikam  
saś śrīvirendravikhyātaḥ kontyai sarvvaṃ ahād imam ||*

We notice two mistakes of the scribe, which Cœdès does not correct in his edition (Arlo Griffiths, personal communication, November 2021). The term *hāsa* in the first quarter is most probably a mistake for *dāsa*, “servant.” Similarly, the verb *ahād* in the last quarter should be corrected to *adād*, “(he) gave.” A revised translation of the verse should be: “The powerful gods together with lands, gardens, servants etc. and clusters of villages; Śrī Virendravikhyāta gave all this to Kontī.” In the double-language inscription of Sdok Kak Thom (K. 235, 11th century CE), the Sanskrit word *deśa* was used as equivalent of the Khmer term *pramāna* “district.” However, we prefer to translate *deśa* in K. 157 as “cluster of villages” because donations of many villages are common in Cambodian epigraphy whereas a donation of districts is very rare.

<sup>33</sup> In Cambodian inscriptions, rice-fields often have names.

The inscription K. 111 (mid-10th century CE) of Vat Sithor<sup>34</sup> contains 100 Sanskrit stanzas written on the four faces of a stela.<sup>35</sup> It provides rich information about the practice of Buddhism in the mid-10th century. It opens with praise of the three bodies of the Buddha, namely Dharmakāya “the Embodiment of Dharma,” Sambhogakāya “the Embodiment for the Enjoyment (of the Dharma),” and Nirmāṇakāya “the Embodiment in Manifestations.” The inscription suggests an influence of Yogācāra doctrine by the mention of the term *cittamātra* “mind-only” and the important text of this doctrine, viz., *Madhyāntavibhāga*. Allusions to Tantrism can also be discerned through the reference to the four *mudrā* as the distinguishing mark of the Yogatantra tradition and the principal text of the Yogatantra, entitled *Sarvatathāgatattvasaṃgraha*,<sup>36</sup> through the rites of peace and prosperity (*śānti-puṣṭi*), and through the mention of two iconic terms of tantric Buddhist tradition, viz., *vajra* and *ghaṇṭā*. On the whole, the inscription appears to allude to a form of Mahāyāna Buddhism, in which a community of Buddhist individuals chose to follow the path of the Bodhisattvas. To them, following the path meant simply practicing Buddhism in its most rigorous and demanding form, with the hope of attaining the same stage of advancement as the Buddha himself, viz., complete and perfect enlightenment.<sup>37</sup>

The inscription was probably composed by a Buddhist monk named Kīrtipaṇḍita who was the royal preceptor of King Jayavarman V (968–1001 CE), after serving as a royal emissary (*upāntacāra*) for a certain period. He was an important figure in reinvigorating Buddhist

<sup>34</sup> The official name of this modern monastery is Vat Preah Reach Nivesthana Srei So Chhor, located in Sithor commune, Khsac Kandal district, Kandal province.

<sup>35</sup> The stela which was found in 1882 is now reported lost. The inscription has been studied many times; firstly, by Émile Senart, “Une inscription bouddhique du Cambodge [K. 111].” *Revue archéologique* 1 (March 1883). Cœdès, *Inscriptions du Cambodge*, vol. 6 provides a full translation of the text in French and Green (“The Vat Sithor Inscription”) a full translation in English. Some excerpts of the text can be found in Jean Filliozat, “Sur le çivaïsme et le bouddhisme du Cambodge, à propos de deux livres récents,” *Bulletin de l’École française d’Extrême-Orient* 70, no. 1 (1981); David Snellgrove, “The Relationship of Buddhism to the Royal Brahmanical Cult in the Khmer Empire,” in *Le Parole e i Marmi. Studi in onore di Raniero Gnoli nel suo 70° compleanno*, ed. Raffaele Torella (Roma: Istituto Italiano per l’Africa e l’Oriente, 2001) and Peter Sharrock, “The Buddhist Pantheon of the Bayon of Angkor: An Historical and Art Historical Reconstruction of the Bayon and its Religious and Political Roots” (PhD diss., SOAS London University, 2006).

<sup>36</sup> Alexis Sanderson, “The Śaiva Religion among the Khmers (Part I),” *Bulletin de l’École française d’Extrême-Orient* 90–91 (2003–2004): 427, n. 284.

<sup>37</sup> Green, “The Vat Sithor Inscription,” 25.

practices, which had become lax during the previous reigns. He restored and installed numerous Buddhist images and built temples (*prāsāda*), hermitages (*āśrama*) and water bodies (*jalāśaya*). He also founded a monastery according to rules and stayed (probably in the monastery) from afar (*utpādya vidhivad vihāraṃ dūrataḥ sthitaḥ*).<sup>38</sup> The monks who dwelled in that monastery had to obey some particular rites and regulations. One of these rules forbids the monks to participate in Brahmanical sacrificial rites (*vajña*). The inscription closes by mentioning the benefits of respecting the Dharma and the teachers (*guru*), and by warning people of misconduct towards Dharma.

A fragmentary inscription from around 1011 CE (K. 370; found in Vat Supat in Ban Khamoi, Ubon Ratchathani province of Thailand) mentions a “large monastery” (*mahāvihāra*).<sup>39</sup> From the available text, we can infer that four masters (*ācārya*) installed probably four statues of a deity called Śrī Dhātu “Illustrious Relics (of the Buddha)”<sup>40</sup> with the preceding title *Kamrateṅ Jagat* “lord of the world”<sup>41</sup> at the large

<sup>38</sup> The term *dūrataḥ* “from afar” in the stanza LXV hints that Kīrtipaṇḍita might have left the capital Angkor to the region of Vat Sithor (more than 300 kilometers away) and established a *vihāra* there.

<sup>39</sup> It is possible that the term *vihāra ruṅ* in the inscription K. 505 (see pp. 237–238) is a Khmer equivalent of the Sanskrit term *mahāvihāra*. This term became common in India in the Gupta period, around the 4th/5th centuries (Annette Schmiedchen, personal communication, December 2021).

<sup>40</sup> The cult of relics and stupas is peculiar to Buddhism (Peter Skilling, “Relics: The Heart of Buddhist Veneration,” in *Relics and Relic Worship in Early Buddhism: India, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, and Burma*, eds. Janice Stargardt and Michael Willis (London: The British Museum, 2018), 10. Evidence for the worship of the relics of the Buddha is rare in the extant Cambodian epigraphical sources. It is basically limited to one inscription, K. 40 (5th–6th centuries CE, Ta Keo province), which praises the power of the Buddha’s relics as causing the happiness of beings. Whether the name of the statues of the deity in this inscription K. 370, viz., Śrī Dhātu, suggests that the statues contained relics of the Buddha is to be confirmed. However, Filliozat, “Sur le çivaïsme,” 91 proposes to translate the expression *Kamrateṅ Jagat Śrī Dhātu* as “Lords of the world of the Fortunate [four] elements” because the term *dhātu*, in the sense of “elements,” is of four types in Buddhism. The estampage of the inscription (EFEO n. 1342) which is available to us has only the first 12 lines of altogether 22. We cannot check the term *Dhātu* which appears in the line 14.

<sup>41</sup> This title, *kamrateṅ jagat*, was used from the 10th to 13th centuries in front of a deity’s name of Sanskrit or Khmer origin. It has been studied by many scholars. For the most recent study, see Eric Bourdonneau, “La stèle de Sdok Kak Thom et le *Devarāja*: récits et acteurs d’une ‘naissance’,” in *Le passé des Khmers : langues, textes, rites*, ed. Nasir Abdoul-Carime, Joseph Thach, and Grégory Mikaelian (Berne: Peter Lang 2016) and for a comparison with another title, *vraḥ*



monastery. The names of two of these *ācāryas*, are given in the inscription as Ānanda and Sumedha.<sup>42</sup> The installation was accompanied by a donation of Kamsten Śrī Dharaṇendravīra and other wealthy men and consisted of servants, cattle, paddy fields, fabrics, and ritual utensils.

In the Angkorian capital city in 1186 CE, King Jayavarman VII founded a city called Rājavihāra “royal monastery” (*purī rājavihāranāmnī*)<sup>43</sup> dedicated to his mother Jayarājacūḍāmaṇi in the form of Mahāyānist deity Prajñāpāramitā. The Royal Monastery is identified with Ta Prohm temple in the archeological park of Angkor. A statue of Jayarājacūḍāmaṇi was believed to be installed in the central tower of the temple along with a statue of the king’s guru called Śrījayamaṅgalārthadeva or Śrījayakīrtideva as well as 260 surrounding images. We know from the short inscriptions on the doorjambs of several of the temple’s sanctuaries that the Royal Monastery housed many images of the Buddha and of Mahāyānist and Brahmanical deities, as well as local guardian deities that are mentioned by individual names.<sup>44</sup>

More information about the religious practice in the monastery can be gleaned from the temple’s foundation stela K. 273 (145 stanzas composed by the king’s son prince Sūryakumāra). It opens with an homage to the Buddhist three gems: the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Saṅgha. It also pays homage to Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara (Lokeśvara) and the Buddhas’ mother (*jinānām janānīm*), i.e., Prajñāpārami-

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*kaṃrateṅ añ*, see Kunthea Chhom, *Le rôle du sanskrit dans le développement de la langue khmère: une étude épigraphique du VI<sup>e</sup> au XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Phnom Penh: Sāstrā, 2018), 255–260.

<sup>42</sup> These two names are very common in the Buddhist context and are also known in Buddhist literature: the first one, Ānanda, was the personal attendant of the Buddha and the latter, Sumedha, was a Bodhisattva at the time of Dīpaṅkara Buddha.

<sup>43</sup> The term *rājavihāra* which appears in the stanza XXXV is glossed as *rajamandira* in the stanza LXXXI of the same inscription.

<sup>44</sup> The short inscriptions are first edited in George Cœdès, “Les inscriptions du Bayon,” *Bulletin de la Commission Archéologique de l’Indochine* (1913) and George Cœdès, “Études cambodgiennes XXXIX : L’épigraphie des monuments de Jayavarman VII,” *Bulletin de l’École française d’Extrême-Orient* 44 (1951). They are reedited in Thomas Maxwell, “The short inscriptions of the Bayon and contemporary temples,” in *Bayon: New Perspectives*, ed. Joyce Clark (Bangkok: River Books 2007) and Kunthea Chhom, *Silācārīk lae me dvār tām prāsād khmuṅ rājy brah pād jayavarman dī 7 [Inscriptions on temples’ doorjambs in the reign of King Jayavarman VII]* (Siem Reap: Publication of Apsara National Authority, 2020).

tā.<sup>45</sup> Next, the inscription mentions the genealogy of the king and praises him for his glory, heroism, and generosity towards his *guru*, his *guru*'s family, and his subjects. For the maintenance of daily activities and various festivals which were held at the monastery, King Jayavarman VII and other wealthy persons made grand donations such as:

- Gold used in making utensils such as small pots and boxes: 28 *bhāra*, 4 *tulā*, 2 *pāda*
- 4540 precious gems, beryls, color gems, etc.;
- Bronze: 120 *bhāra* and 13 ..., 13 *tulā*, 1 *kaṭṭī* and 5 *paṇa*;  
Brass: 2339 *bhāra* and 17 *tulā*;
- Tin: 10 *kaṭṭī*, 7 *tulā*, 15 *bhāra*;
- Lead: 437 *bhāra*, ½ *tulā*;
- 967 Chinese pieces of cloth, and 512 beds made of silk.

Further, the inscription informs that the king founded 102 hospitals (*ārogyaśālā*) along important roads across his kingdom. A detailed list of the budget for the expenditure for those hospitals is given. These charitable foundations were dedicated to the king's mother as the presiding deity of the monastery, and the merit should help the king to obtain Buddhahood.

In each hospital, a stela carrying an almost identical inscription (K. 386+) was installed. After an homage to the Buddha and Bhaiṣajyaguru "Master of medicine" along with his assistants namely Sūryavairocana and Candravairocana, as well as a praise of King Jayavarman VII for his exceptional compassion toward the sick people, the inscription enumerates the personnel of the hospitals, viz., two doctors, three assistants to the doctors, two cooks, etc. Moreover, medicinal plants and animals which were used to make medicine are enumerated. The number of the personnel varies between 50 to 98. In addition, two priests (*yājaka*) and an astrologer (*gaṇaka*)<sup>46</sup> were appointed by the

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<sup>45</sup> The Sanskrit term *prajñāpāramitā* means "perfection of wisdom." Perhaps because it is in the feminine gender, *Prajñāpāramitā* also became the name of a goddess, referred to as the mother of all buddhas (*jinajanani*), who is the embodiment of the perfection of wisdom. Buswell and Lopez, *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*, 656–657.

<sup>46</sup> The meaning "astrologer" is adopted here because the worship to deities in the hospitals required some astrologers to indicate the time of worship. The term *gaṇaka* appears also in the stanza XXXII of the contemporary inscription of Pra-

*adhyāpaka* “teacher” of the Royal Monastery to conduct worship in each hospital. This suggests that the Royal Monastery oversaw the management of the 102 hospitals.

K. 692 of Prasat Tor dated 1195 CE is another inscription of the reign of King Jayavarman VII. It is believed that the inscription was composed by a certain Bhūpendrapaṇḍita III who was born in a devout Brahmanical family. The inscription does not directly allude to Buddhism. In the context of praising various pious foundations of the king, a *vihāra* surrounded by hermitages (*āśrama*) is mentioned. No further information about the *vihāra* is given that would allow its identification. It is not impossible that the term *vihāra* here refers in an abridged form to the Royal Monastery (Rājavihāra or Ta Prohm), which the king established in 1186 CE.

In the 14th century during which the decline of Angkor is generally considered to have set in, two inscriptions of Theravāda Buddhist affiliation are known. The first one is K. 754 of Kok Svay Chek about four kilometers to the southeast corner of Western Baray (Siem Reap province). It is written in Pali and Khmer and dates to the reign of King Śrīndravarman (1295–1308 CE). In 1308 CE, the king offered a village to a certain senior monk Mahāthera Śrīndramauli (Sirindamoḷi in Pali). By the king’s order, a lay woman Mālinīratnalakṣmī (Mālinīratana-lakkhī in Pali) founded a monastery (*vihāra*). A year later, she installed an image of the Buddha and made a donation to the monastery. The king also gave four villages for its subsistence.

The second inscription is K. 413 of Prey Svay or Mango Grove (Sukhothai province, Thailand) composed in Old Khmer language during the reign of a Siamese king named Ḷdaiya, alias Śrī Sūryavaṃśa Rāmamahādharṃarājādhirāja I.<sup>47</sup> The inscription, of exceptional literary quality, praises the heroism and the deep knowledge of the king. In 1361 CE, the king ordered the construction of a monastery (*kuṭi-*

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sat Tor (12th century) in a clear astrological context; see George Cœdès, *Inscriptions du Cambodge*, vol. 1 (Hanoi, Paris: École française d’Extrême-Orient, 1937), 234, 244.

<sup>47</sup> Although the inscription mentions religious activities of a Siamese king, it is included in our study because the language used is Old Khmer and its content is reminiscent of Angkorian culture. The stela, inscribed on its four faces, was discovered in 1834 CE by King Rāma IV at Vat Jai (probably Vat Mahāthāt) in the Sukhothai city wall. Since then, it has been published several times by scholars; the most recent publication is by Saveros Pou, “Inscription dite de Brai Svây ou « Bois des Manguiers » de Sukhoday,” *Bulletin de l’École française d’Extrême-Orient* 65, no. 2 (1978) focusing on the linguistic aspect of the inscription. Around the same time of the composition of this inscription in Old Khmer language, two almost identical inscriptions in Old Siamese and Pali languages were established.

*vihāra*) at Mango Grove in Sukhodaya city (see p. 252). The monastery was to host a delegation of monks headed by a patriarch (*mahāsāmī saṅgharāja*) from the island of Laṅkā (*laṅkādvīpa*, Sri Lanka) during the usual three months' retreat of the rainy season. At the end of the retreat, the king made a grand donation which consisted of gold, silver, *khvad* (cowries?), areca fruits, robes (*cīvara*), alms-bowls, pillows, cushions, mats, and various other items of countless quantity, and an erection of a life-size Buddha statue in bronze in the center of the city wall of Sukhothai (see further below and Figure 3). Soon after the event, the king was ordained as a novice (*sāmaṇera*) by the Mahāsāmī at his palace.<sup>48</sup> The inscription reports that when the king declared his determination (*adhiṣṭhāna*) not to become a universal monarch, or god Indra, or god Brahmā, but rather to become a Buddha in order to help all creatures to cross the three worlds, the earth shook in all directions. The earth shook for the second time in all directions when the newly ordained novice put his feet down on the ground, when he departed from the palace to the monastery of Prey Svay.

Besides the eight inscriptions which clearly attest the existence of the monasteries discussed above, there are five more inscriptions (K. 56, K. 182-2, K. 224, K. 908, K. 1052) which mention the term *vihāra*. But the context of these inscriptions is rather ambiguous. K. 182-2 is an Old Khmer inscription from the 10th-century temple Prasat Chen of the Koh Ker group (about 100 kilometers to the northeast of Angkor, in Preah Vihear province).<sup>49</sup> It lists the names of temple-servants. A servant, probably a man (*gho*), was called Chke Vihāra “dog of the monastery.”

Further, the stela of Kdei Ang (K. 56, 10th century, Prey Veng province) records an installation of several images of Viṣṇu and Lakṣmī and a donation of land to the deities by a high-ranking official of King Rājendravarman (944–968 CE), Mahendrādhipativarman. The term *vihāra* is here found in the context of the donation of a paddy field called Sunnāy Dol, being given in exchange with the paddy

<sup>48</sup> According to the inscription, the king got ordained on the 8th day of waning moon of *punarvasu nakṣatra* of the year 1283 Śaka era, which may correspond to either September 23, 1361, or October 22, 1361.

<sup>49</sup> Koh Ker was a capital city established by King Jayavarman IV (928–941 CE). The temples of Koh Ker are known for their inscriptions which record at least 4,000 names of temple servants. About half of these names are Khmer names, some of them carrying a quite pejorative connotation, such as: Chke “dog,” Chmā “cat,” Saquy “smelly,” etc. A systematic study of the personal names found in Khmer inscriptions is still a desideratum.

field(s) of the people of Stuk Veñ at Vrai Vihāra “forest of the monastery.”

K. 1052 of Kpal Krapī (around 1010 CE, Banteay Meanchey Province) contains a toponym coined with the term *vihāra*. The double-language inscription begins with three Sanskrit stanzas worshipping Mahāyānist deities, namely Śrīghaṇa, Lokeśa, and Vajrapāṇi.<sup>50</sup> It records a story of succession of a family’s title to a temple (which was probably located near its place of provenance, viz., in the vicinity of Banteay Chhmar temple). In 1010 CE, King Sūryavarman ordered his officers to transfer a group of servants from this temple to serve the god at Vrac. Among the officers who were to carry out the order was Mratāñ Khloñ Vnam Vihāra “Mratāñ, the chief of the mountain/ temple ‘Vihāra’.” Since the context is not entirely clear, the expression can be interpreted in at least two ways: either Mratāñ, the chief of a mountain called “Vihāra,” since a monastery was built on top of it, or Mratāñ, the chief of a mountain-temple which was a monastery.

K. 224, an inscription of Prasat Ta Siev (Banteay Meanchey province) is contemporary to K. 1052. The passage concerning the king’s order in the latter text appears almost verbatim again in K. 224, but here less well preserved. Of the entire expression, only the words *vnam vihāra* are legible in K. 224.

K. 908, the stela of Preah Khan temple (Siem Reap province), dates from the reign of King Jayavarman VII (1181–c. 1218 CE). The temple of Preah Khan was dedicated to the king’s father in the form of the Mahāyānist deity Lokeśvara. After the praise of the king’s quality and his donation to the temple, the inscription mentions the king’s order to install in twenty-three different cities twenty-three images of the Buddha named Jayabuddhamahānātha. Vihārottāraka (maybe “[a city] with a monastery in its north”) is the name of one of the cities.<sup>51</sup> Further research is needed in order to identify this city.

<sup>50</sup> For a note on the occurrences of the epithet Śrīghaṇa in Buddhist literature and epigraphy, see Peter Skilling, “Random Jottings on Śrīghaṇa: An Epithet of the Buddha,” *Annual Report of the International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhology at Soka University for the Academic Year 2003 7* (2004) and Claude Jacques, “The Buddhist sect of Śrīghaṇa in Ancient Khmer Lands,” in *Buddhist Legacies in Mainland Southeast Asia*, eds. François Lagarde and Paritta Chalermpong Koanantakool (Paris and Bangkok: École française d’Extrême-Orient and Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Centre, 2006) for a discussion of Śrīghaṇa’s religious affiliation in Cambodian context.

<sup>51</sup> Because of the *-ka* at the end of the name, we take the expression to be a *bahuvrīhi* compound that refers to the city.

### 5. Physical aspects of some *vihāras*

Only two of the monasteries mentioned in the inscriptions have survived in their original forms, although damaged to some extent, viz., the Royal Monastery in K. 273 and the monastery at Mango Grove in K. 413.

The inscription K. 273 states that in the territory conquered by him, King Jayavarman VII founded a city which was called Rājavihāra “Royal Monastery” (alias the temple of Ta Prohm, Siem Reap province) and had the buildings adorned with gold and gems. Although the monastery is now in ruins, its central sanctuary contains some alignments of holes which suggest that its walls were covered with wooden or metal plaques.<sup>52</sup>

The Royal Monastery is a complex of 1015 meters by 670 meters consisting of five enclosures and an opening each, to the east and to the west (see Figure 2). The central tower and the sanctuaries and structures within the third enclosure are believed to have housed the images of Prajñāpāramitā and other deities (see p. 245). The fourth enclosure is surrounded by a simple moat, while the third enclosure is surrounded by a moat that ends in two small ponds on the eastern side. Between the moat of the third enclosure and the fourth enclosure stand ninety-three cells in brick and laterite. According to Olivier Cunin, there were ninety-four cells originally, out of which one on the east side has been replaced by a building with pillars which is now ruined.<sup>53</sup>

The inscription K. 273 describes that the Royal Monastery had 39 storeyed towers (*valabhiprāsādāh*),<sup>54</sup> 566 clusters of dwelling places

<sup>52</sup> Maurice Glaize, *Les monuments du groupe d'Angkor* (Paris: Adrien-Maison-neuve, 1993, 1st ed. 1963), 186; cited in Olivier Cunin, “De Ta Prohm au Bayon. Analyse comparative de l’histoire architecturale des principaux monuments du style du Bayon” (PhD diss., Institut National Polytechnique de Lorraine, 2004), 430.

<sup>53</sup> Cunin, “De Ta Prohm au Bayon,” 71–72.

<sup>54</sup> The above translation “storeyed temple” of the expression *valabhiprāsāda* is hypothetical as the term *valabhi* is yet to be defined in the context of Khmer architecture. In the edition of the inscription of Sdok Kak Thom (K. 235), “Les inscriptions de Sdok Kāk Thom, Phnom Sandak et Prāh Vihār,” *Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient* 43 (1943), 74–75, George Cœdès and Pierre Dupont gloss it as “bâtiment annexe (annexe building).” However, George Cœdès, in his *Inscriptions du Cambodge*, vol. 6, 97–104, renders it as “tour à étage (storeyed tower)” while editing the inscription of Prasat Beng Vien or Kok Prasat (K. 872). The text mentions that a *valabhī* was built for housing a Buddha statue. The poor archaeological remains of the site do not allow more insight on this structure. <https://cisark.mefa.gov.kh/core/showsite.php?id=1728> (accessed in May 2021).

made of stone (*khaṇḍdāny upalaveśmanām*), 288 clusters of dwelling places made of brick (*iṣṭakāveśmanāṃ khaṇḍdāni*), a pond (*vāpi*), a tank (*taṭāka*), and enclosure walls made of laterite (*śarkkaraughopalakṣṭapṛākārāṇām*).<sup>55</sup> The number of the different kinds of architectural structures are far higher than what can be noticed on the ground today. The dwelling places made of brick, for example, refer most probably to the cells along the fourth enclosure. The number of the cells, though, is only ninety-three, hence less than one third of the stated number (288). Ruling out the speculation that the numbers were exaggerated for some reason, one of the possible adjustments is that the temple might have had an annex in which the large religious community of teachers and students (see p. 258) could have been accommodated. It appears plausible that the nearby contemporary temple to the southeast, Banteay Kdei, could have served as such an annex.<sup>56</sup>

The monastery at Mango Grove, mentioned in K. 413,<sup>57</sup> is identified with the brick temple called Wat Pa Mamuang (“monastery of mango grove” in Thai) located in the present-day Sukhothai Historical Park. Today’s park marks the historical location of the ancient capital city of the kingdom of Sukhothai. It is a city surrounded by walls and moats, about 1,810 meters east-west and 1,400 meters south-north (see Figure 3).<sup>58</sup> Situated to the west of the city’s wall, the monastery comprises a small compound of 12 by 15 meters, enclosed by a low brick barricade, with a brick stupa in the center and several smaller brick stupas around. The stupas can be dated to the 14th century. To the east of this compound, there is a foundation of a brick hall which can be dated to the same time as the stupas (see Figures 4 & 5). About 50 meters to the south there is a brick structure which is generally identified with the *devālayamahākṣetra* “grand domain which was a residence of the gods.” This hall is mentioned in the inscription as the

<sup>55</sup> The interpretation of all these architectural terms is taken from George Cœdès, “La stèle de Ta-Prohm,” *Bulletin de l’École française d’Extrême-Orient* 6 (1906).

<sup>56</sup> Banteay Kdei is also known by its ancient name as Pūrva-Tathāgata “the Tathāgata (Buddha) of the East” or “Ancient Tathāgata.” For the architectural details of the connection between Ta Prohm temple and Banteay Kdei temple, see Cunin, “De Ta Prohm au Bayon,” 337–339.

<sup>57</sup> The name of the place where the monastery was built, viz., Brai Svāy “Mango grove,” suggests that the monastery was once in a forest; hence possibly a “forest monastery.”

<sup>58</sup> Santana Piromkeat, “The Lay-out of the Buddhist Architecture in the Sukhothai Period at the Old Sukhothai City” (MA thesis, Silpakorn University, 2002), 14. There are approximately 60 archaeological sites in the walled city. The royal palace might be situated in the center.

place where King Īdaiya installed statues of Śiva and Viṣṇu (*brah ma-heśvararūpa viṣṇurūpa*).<sup>59</sup>

As mentioned above, the king had a so-called *kuṭi-vihāra* built. It is the first occurrence of the term *vihāra* in a compound with the term *kuṭi*, “hut.”<sup>60</sup> The term *vihāra* here seems to convey a different meaning than “monastery” as seen in the rest of the corpus (except K. 111, see p. 254). In Pali texts, the term *vihāra* originally meant a specific building type, relatively small but bigger than a *kuṭi*, which was used for dwelling or for other functions of a community. Monastic complexes with dwelling places, stupas, etc., were more often called *ārāma*. In the 5th century, *vihāra* may refer to a whole monastic complex or a specific building inside a monastic complex.<sup>61</sup> The term *vihāra* in the expression *kuṭi-vihāra* refers most probably to a specific building inside a monastic complex. If it had meant a monastic complex, the term *kuṭi* would not have been mentioned because a *vihāra* was expected to contain some *kuṭi*. In other words, the mention of *vihāra* alone would suffice as in other inscriptions. The compound *kuṭi-vihāra* means rather “hut and building” than “hut in/of monastic complex,” for which the Khmer grammar would require a preposition such as *kamluñ* “inside” or *nai* “of” between the two elements of the compound for precision. It can be concluded from the inscription that the *kuṭi-vihāra* was built in less than a year, since the construction is said to have started, when the invited Mahāsāmī Saṅgharāja of Laṅkādvīpa

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<sup>59</sup> The excavations in the 20th century found that King Īdaiya made two larger than life bronze statues of Śiva and Viṣṇu. The statues are now on display in the National Museum in Bangkok.

<sup>60</sup> The term *kuṭi* in Cambodian inscriptions corpus needs to be studied systematically. A brief survey of the corpus shows that it has been used since the 9th century in relation to Saiva temples such as Preah Ko temple and Preah Vihear temple. However, the term appears often in the short inscriptions of the Mahāyānist Bayon temple (12th century). It refers to the sixteen structures which stand between the outer gallery with the inner one and once housed statues of Buddhist and non-Buddhist deities. In Cham inscriptions, the term *kuṭi* appears often in a list of enumeration of various religious institutions. The inscription of temple of Po Klóng Garai (C. 13), for example, mentions *radamñ devālaya vihāra kuṭi śāla arañyāśrayakaraṇa* “*radamñ* ?, temples, monasteries, huts for religious people?, *śālās*, hermitages.” Furthermore, some Indonesian inscriptions record conversions of some *kuṭi* into *vihāra* and *vice versa* (Arlo Griffiths, personal communication, June 2021). For further discussions of *vihāras* in Campā, see Griffiths, Pichon & Southworth (this volume); for those in Indonesia, see Griffiths (this volume).

<sup>61</sup> Petra Kieffer-Pülz (personal communication, February 2022).



and his delegation were already on their journey to Sukhothai.<sup>62</sup> To honor their arrival, the path from the two city gates (east & west) to the Mango Grove monastery (*kuṭi-vihāra*) was decorated “as a road to heaven” (*rū hān phlū svargga*).<sup>63</sup> They were then asked to spend their three months’ retreat of the rainy season there.

The description we find in the text matches to some extent the actual distribution of the archaeological remains of the area. Nevertheless, the question arises: where were the *kuṭi* and the *vihāra*? The *vihāra* may be identified with the remains of the brick hall in front of the stupas. However, there seems no trace of the *kuṭi*. It is not impossible that it was built in light materials (such as wood and thatch) near the hall. Further archeological research of the site is a desideratum.

Although the inscription does not mention the grand central stupa and the surrounding smaller ones, the bricks which were used to build them and their forms suggest that they are contemporary to the inscription, viz., 14th century.<sup>64</sup> It is conceivable that most of the *vihāras* in Cambodia contained one or more stupas like this monastery, although they might not have been mentioned in the inscriptions.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>62</sup> The inscription of Vat Romlok K. 27 (Ta Keo/ 1587 CE, Pali and Khmer) mentions that a meeting hall (*vihāra*) was built within three months. Presumably, it used light materials and was of modest construction.

<sup>63</sup> The expression might be comparable with the Sanskrit *svargasopāna* “stairway to heaven” which appears in some inscriptions at Ajanta, see Vincent Tournier, “Stairway to Heaven and the Path to Buddhahood: Donors and Their Aspirations in 5th/6th-Century Ajanta,” in *Mārga: Paths to Liberation in South Asian Buddhist Traditions. Vol. I. Papers from an International Symposium Held at the Austrian Academy of Sciences, Vienna, December 17–18, 2015*, eds. Cristina Pecchia, Vincent Eltschinger, and Vincent Tournier (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2020), 208.

<sup>64</sup> In the history of the Khmer architecture, the sandstone stupa at Prasat Sasar Sdam from the 12th century is the first known archeological remains of an Angkorian stupa. For details on the stupa of Prasat Sasar Sdam, see CISARK (<https://cisark.mcfa.gov.kh/core/showsite.php?id=783>, accessed in May 2021).

<sup>65</sup> The stupas at Preah Svay may be called *caitya* “object of veneration,” a term borrowed from Sanskrit, as in the case of those which were attached to the ten *vihāras* donated by the royal monk (K. 388, 7th century) or *cetiya*, the Pali variant of *caitya*, as in modern Khmer language. For a discussion of the contextual equivalence of Pali *cetiya* with stupa, see Gregory Schopen, “The Stūpa Cult and the Extant Pāli Vinaya,” *Journal of the Pāli Text Society* 13 (1989). Nevertheless, a *caitya* can take a shape other than a stupa, which is characterized by its bell’s shape. The inscription of Preah Khan temple (K. 908, 12th century), for instance, uses the term *caitya* once as a temple housing 22 images of deities. According to Cunin, “De Ta Prohm au Bayon,” 350, the *caitya* is identified with a Buddhist temple, Krol Ko (12th century, Angkor Park) which was built during the reign of

The identification of the brick hall with the *vihāra* is possible. As mentioned above, a *vihāra* might have multiple functions, one of which was to house Buddha statues (though this function was not explicitly described in the book of monastic disciplines, the Pali Vinaya).<sup>66</sup> In the 10th-century inscription of Vat Sithor (K. 111), the term *vihāra* was used with both meanings, “monastery” and “Buddha-statue hall.” On the one hand, it states that Kīrtipaṇḍita founded a monastery and stayed there (*vihāram kṛtvā sthitaḥ*). On the other, it compares a *vihāra* to a *koṣṭhāgāra* “the royal granary,”<sup>67</sup> if it was not established according to the rules (*na ced vidhivat kṛtaḥ*).<sup>68</sup> Further, it can be inferred from the inscription that the monastery once housed one (or more) Buddha image(s), which were adorned with mobile jewelry or decorations, which could be sold when the *saṅgha* had financial difficulties.

The exact location of the *vihāra*—whether the whole complex or merely the hall—remains unknown. According to Aymonier (1900: 260–261) and Lunet de Lajonquière (1902: 167–169), the modern

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King Jayavarman VII. It consists mainly of a sanctuary in the center of an enclosure wall with a gate (*gopura*) to the east, which was surrounded by a moat.

<sup>66</sup> Petra Kieffer-Pülz (personal communication, February 2022).

<sup>67</sup> D. C. Sircar, *Indian Epigraphical Glossary* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1966), 160. It is a compound of two words: *koṣṭha-āgāra* “depository-building.” It should be similar to the term *koṣṭhikā* in the Mūlasarvāstivādinaya which Gregory Schopen, *Buddhist Monks and Business Matters: Still More Papers on Monastic Buddhism in India* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2004), 51, defines as follow: “a *koṣṭhikā* in Buddhist monastery was a place, probably a room, in which not only books but also legal documents and money were kept.” The term *koṣṭhāgāra* is common in Campā early inscriptions (7th and 8th centuries). It is rendered as “silo” in Arlo Griffiths and William Southworth, “La stèle d’installation de Śrī Satyadeveśvara : une nouvelle inscription sanskrite du Campā trouvée à Phước Thiên,” *Journal Asiatique* 295, no. 2 (2007) and Arlo Griffiths and William Southworth, “Études du corpus des inscriptions du Campā. II. La stèle d’installation de Śrī Ādideveśvara : une nouvelle inscription de Satyavarman trouvée dans le temple de Hoà Lai et son importance pour l’histoire du Pāṇḍuraṅga,” *Journal Asiatique* 299, no. 1 (2011).

<sup>68</sup> The prescription that a *vihāra* must be founded “according to the rules or correctly (*vidhivat*)” is ambiguous as the expression “according to the rules” may imply that a *vihāra* should be established with certain rituals (*vidhi-vat*) or/and by fulfilling some architectural requirements. The term *vidhivat* is to some extent comparable to the Pali *kappiya* “according to rule,” which was found in compound with the term *kuṭi*, “hut.” According to the Samantapāsādikā, a 5th-century commentary to the Vinaya, if a *vihāra* was built as a *kappiyakuṭi*, “hut of allowable things,” some specific sentences must be recited at the beginning of the building process (Petra Kieffer-Pülz, personal communication, February 2022).

monastery, called Sithor, where the stela has been found, consisted of three *vihāras* “Buddha-statue halls” aligned on a north-south axis and facing east. In the 1960s, a construction of a new *vihāra* made two of the three original *vihāras* disappear, viz., the central and the northern ones.<sup>69</sup> There are also five brick stupas<sup>70</sup> of the pre-modern period in the monastery. Three of them have been damaged, whereas two others are in fairly good state of conservation. The architectural features of these stupas suggest that they belong to the 15th or 16th century.<sup>71</sup> To date, no trace of any 10th-century structure is known.

More archeological research is definitely needed for the five following sites: Khao Rang (K. 505), Hin Khon (K. 388 and K. 389), Vat Chhneath (K. 755), Vat Kdei Car (K. 157),<sup>72</sup> and Kok Svay Chek (K. 754). The latter, located about 4 kilometers to the southwest corner of the Western Bārāy in the Angkor archeological park, faded into oblivion. Remains of the 14th-century monastery may be buried under some modern settlements of the village.<sup>73</sup> On the top of the Khao Rang mountain, there are bricks and sandstone fragments which suggest the earlier existence of a monastery in the 7th century. The site of Hin Kon has also some remains of probably one or two monastery/ies of pre-Angkorian or Angkorian times.<sup>74</sup> Vat Chhneath and Vat Kdei Car are modern monasteries, probably built on top of ancient ones. At Vat Chhneath, where an ancient moat can be traced, some stone slabs and ablutions basins together with the Buddha statue bearing K. 755 have been found.<sup>75</sup> Vat Kdei Char had its basement/foundation made of blocs of laterite of an ancient monument; some sandstone pedestals and two lintels have also been found at this site.

Some founders expressed concerns in their inscriptions about the future of the monasteries they established. The monastery Śrī Candana, the Royal Monastery and the monastery at Mango Grove were

<sup>69</sup> Madeleine Giteau, *Iconographie du Cambodge post-Angkorien* (Paris: Publication de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient, 1975), 62–63.

<sup>70</sup> Étienne Edmond Lunet de Lajonquière, *Inventaire descriptif des monuments du Cambodge* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1902), 169), states that there were six stupas of the 10th century. For a detailed historiography of the stupas in Cambodia, see Henri Marchal, “Note sur la forme du *stūpa* au Cambodge,” *Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient* 44, no. 2 (1951).

<sup>71</sup> Giteau, *Iconographie du Cambodge*, 62.

<sup>72</sup> The modern monastery is also known as Vat Entek Komar bearing the archeological inventory number IK 168.

<sup>73</sup> An excursion to the village of Kok Svay Chek was made in May 2019.

<sup>74</sup> Kangvol Khatshima (personal communication, November 2020).

<sup>75</sup> Khatna Pi and Chhnteng Hun (personal communication, November 2020) and CISARK website address <https://cisark.mcf.gov.kh> (accessed in February 2021) bearing IK number 25.11.

under the direct patronage of three ruling kings, viz., King Jayavarman I, King Jayavarman VII, and King Ļdaiya, respectively. They were, therefore, significant institutions during the kings' reigns. But King Jayavarman VII wished his foundation to last longer than his reign. At the end of inscription K. 273, he implored his successors to protect the Royal Monastery from thieves and evil people. Vandalism done to Buddhist images was attested already two centuries before King Jayavarman VII's reign, in the inscription of Vat Sithor K. 111 (see p. 244). Kīrtipaṇḍita, who had seen the destruction, was thus concerned about the survival of his monastery. The last section of the inscription threatens the wicked people who would destroy the property of the monastery with inability to reach a state of purity in their life and with punishment from King Jayavarman V. The 7th-century inscription K. 1426 also states that King Jayavarman I ordered some modalities of management for the monastery Śrī Candana: those who flouted the king's order were punished. Another 7th-century inscription (K. 388) threatens any evil person who harmed the ten *vihāras* donated by Rājabhikṣu, a monk of royal blood, to go to twenty-one hells.<sup>76</sup> While many later monasteries have survived, we can state that most of the ones constructed between the 7th and 10th centuries CE have vanished.

### 6. *Vihāra* as a place of dwelling, a place of learning and a place of worship

The inscriptions, as shown in the map (Figure 1), form clusters in the regions of Angkor Borei and Angkor. Angkor Borei (Ta Keo province, Cambodia) is believed to have been the capital of the polity known in Chinese sources (between the 3rd and the 7th centuries CE) as Funan. It was linked to Oc Eo (An Giang province, Vietnam) which appears to have been an important economic center in the Mekong Delta, relying on trade connections. Around the 7th century, the capital or center of political power was moved northward and was settled in Angkor from the 9th to the 14th centuries CE (with a break of about twenty years in the 10th century CE to Koh Ker, a capital about 80 km north-east of Angkor). The trade continued inland through the Mekong, but

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<sup>76</sup> Inscriptions of ancient Cambodia mention different numbers of hells. The number twenty-one, as given in this inscription, is rare, whereas the number thirty-two is more common. The numbers of hells in Cambodian inscriptions will be discussed at length in our article "Benedictions and Maledictions in Cambodian Inscriptions" (in process).

in smaller scale, and the economy relied more on agriculture. It is obvious that the concentration of the inscriptions coincides with the shift of the state center from the coastal commerce-oriented southern region in pre-Angkor times to the inland agriculture-oriented northern region in the Angkor period. The *vihāras* in our study were mostly supported through an agriculture-based economy, thus offerings of servants, fields, and cattle to the *vihāras* are common in the inscriptions. The servants, as a labor force to cultivate the fields, could be mobilized from nearby or faraway areas.<sup>77</sup>

In addition to producing the food supply, the *vihāras* also served three main functions. First, from the beginning of Buddhist monasticism, a *vihāra* was conceived to be a dwelling place for the Buddhist Order (*saṅgha*),<sup>78</sup> especially during the retreat for the rainy season. This function is explicitly observed in three inscriptions, viz., K. 111, K. 413 and K. 273.

According to K. 111, Kīrtipaṇḍita established a monastery and stayed there, probably as head of the monastery (*vihārādhikṛta*). In that monastery, there were many monks (*bhikṣu*), a sacrificer (*yājaka*), and a priest (*purohita*).<sup>79</sup>

In the case of the monastery at Mango Grove, the *vihāra*'s function as a dwelling place is stated explicitly in the inscription (K. 413) through the expression *kuṭi-vihāra* "hut-hall." As already discussed, King Ḷdaiya founded the huts (*kuṭi*) to house his guests from Sri Lanka. After his ordination, he might have also stayed there with them.

In the inscription of Kok Svay Chek (K. 754), the *vihāra*, which was founded by the lay woman Mālinīratnalakṣmī, is qualified by the

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<sup>77</sup> Michael Vickery, "The Khmer Inscriptions of Roluos (Preah Ko and Lolei): Documents from a Transition Period in Cambodian History," *Seksa Khmer, Nouvelle Série* 1 (1999): 72, remarks that the servants (or "working personnel," to repeat his words) were listed by territorial groups only at the end of the pre-Angkor period in the 8th century. The servants of Preah Ko and Lolei temples were grouped according to their villages (*sruk*) of origin; some of them were known to have stemmed from as far as hundreds of kilometers away from the temples they were then attached to. For a discussion of the temple as focus of political and economic activity in pre-Angkor Cambodia, see Vickery, *Society, Economics*, 274ff.

<sup>78</sup> The great *vihāras* housed, besides the ordained members of the *saṅgha*, also lay-people who served as servants and caretakers.

<sup>79</sup> The inscription does not mention the number of the people living in the monastery. While the term *bhikṣu* is in plural form, the terms *yājaka* and *purohita* are in singular. This suggests that there was one sacrificer and one priest. However, we must be careful that the singular form can occasionally be used for plural in Sanskrit. Moreover, the different duties of the *yājaka* and the *purohita* are still to be defined.

Khmer term *samññ* “residence.”<sup>80</sup> It is clear that the monastery served as residence for monks.

The Royal Monastery was described (in K. 273) as a city (*purī*) with many living quarters. It housed at least 1,410 people: 1 teacher (*adhyāpaka*), 439 *dharmadhārins*, and 970 students (*adhyeṭṭvāsins*). The term *dharmadhārin* is not attested in any standard dictionaries but its base and possibly synonym *dharmadhara* “bearer of the *dharmā*” is used in Buddhist context to refer to the monks who were specialists in the *dharmā*, beside the specialists of the *vinaya* (*vinayadhara*) and the specialists of the proto-*abhidharma* (*māṭṛkādhara*).<sup>81</sup> Since both the Buddhist and Brahmanical deities were worshiped in the Royal Monastery (see p. 260), we are unable to state whether the *dharmadhārins* were all Buddhist and ordained.

The monastery was also a dwelling place for some of the “personnel.” There were altogether 79,365 people (*strīpumsa*) working for the monastery, 66,625 of them were to perform rituals to deities and 12,640 were workers (*kārin*), supervisors of the workers (*adhikārin*), female servants (*paricārikā*) and female dancers (*narttakī*).<sup>82</sup> Among the 12,640 people, some had a right to residence in the monastery (*tatsthitidāyin*). In addition to the ninety-three cells, which attest human habitation in the monastery, the domain between the fourth and the fifth enclosures is full of traces of ponds.<sup>83</sup> Since ponds and houses always formed a close symbiosis in Khmer culture, this suggests the existence of clusters of houses which may have served for the personnel of the monastery.<sup>84</sup>

Second, the mentioning (K. 273) of the presence of a teacher, of 439 “bearers of the *dharmā*” and of 970 students at the Royal Monastery suggests that the monastery also functioned as a place of instruction and learning. The inscription does not give further details of the studies taught there. However, we can infer that the Buddhist scriptures were among the main subjects of study at the monastery as evidenced in the contemporary inscription of Phimeanakas, viz., K. 485

<sup>80</sup> Saveros Pou, *Dictionnaire vieux-khmer-français-anglais. An Old Khmer-French-English Dictionary* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2004), 483.

<sup>81</sup> Buswell and Lopez, *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*, 155.

<sup>82</sup> As the total of 66,625 (performers of rituals) and 12,640 (workers, etc.) makes only 79,265, we may presume, that the specific tasks of another 100 employees were not explicitly mentioned.

<sup>83</sup> Reference is made here to the photographs made by the Cambodian Archaeological LiDAR Consortium in 2012.

<sup>84</sup> Since these dwelling places are situated in the outer sections of the monastery-complex, they would have served the workers and other personnel.

(12th century CE). This inscription states that Queen Indradevī, one of the two wives of King Jayavarman VII, was a devout and learned Buddhist and she taught at Nagendratuṅga which was the best place on earth for scriptural studies (*vasudhādike śrutau*). Besides the Buddhist scriptures, it is possible that many Sanskritic sciences such as grammar, astrology, Dharmaśāstra (“Codes of Law”),<sup>85</sup> and especially medical treatises were also taught in the Royal Monastery as it functioned as a “head-quarter” of the 102 hospitals where the medical treatment was closely related to the cult of Bhaiṣajyaguru “the Buddha, Master of medicines.”

The inscription of Vat Sithor (K. 111) hints at three Buddhist treatises of Mahāyānist and tantric traditions, namely Madhyāntavibhāgaśāstra, Lakṣaṅgrantha Abhiprajña, and Sarvatathāgatātattvasaṅgraha. Kīrtipaṇḍita, who had a vast degree of knowledge, taught them at various places to both male and female disciples and might have taught them at his monastery too. Among the activities related to study, the inscription only mentions the transcribing of manuscripts of holy texts.

Finally, numerous inscriptions mention processions of the Buddha images, which are kept in the monasteries. This characterizes the monastery also as a place of worship.<sup>86</sup> The earliest procession known in Cambodian inscriptions was held at Candanavihāra (K. 1426) during the yearly festival on full moon-day of the month of Mādhava, i.e., Vaiśākha:

*mādhave mādhave māsi pūrṇṇoditaniśākare  
[ta]thāgatasya pratimā-gamanan niyatotsavam*

“In spring, in the month of Mādhava (April–May), when the risen moon is full, the procession of the image of the Buddha is to have a fixed festival.”<sup>87</sup>

<sup>85</sup> By Sanskritic science, we mean a science which reveals the typical civilization of Sanskrit texts or expressions. For names of Sanskritic sciences and doctrines known in ancient Cambodia, see Chhom, *Le rôle du sanskrit*, 231–244.

<sup>86</sup> The image processions in the Buddhist context are attested as early as the beginning of the Christian era in the Mūlasarvāstivādinaya (Schopen, *Buddhist Monks*, 36–37). In Sri Lanka, an image procession of Mahinda Thera during Mahinda festival was conducted as early as the 4th century CE. See Petra Kieffer-Pülz, “Old and New Ritual: Advancing the Date of the Invitation Ceremony (*pavāraṇā*) with Regard to the Mahinda Festival,” in *Jaina-Itihāsa-Ratna*, eds. Ute Hüsken, Petra Kieffer-Pülz and Anne Peters (Marburg: Indica et Tibetica, 2006), 347.

<sup>87</sup> Kunthea Chhom, Dominic Goodall, and Arlo Griffiths on K. 1426, in preparation.

The mention of the term *pratimā-gamana* (“procession of the image”) suggests that the image was a kind of *utsavamūrti*, an “image to be taken for procession in a festival.” An *utsavamūrti* is relatively small and made from metal, whereas the main image that is installed in the sanctuary, is normally larger, made of stone, and it is fixed on a pedestal that is inserted into the ground and thus immovable. Among the inscriptions after the 7th century that attest to a god’s image procession,<sup>88</sup> the inscription of Phnom Bayang (K. 853, 9th century) records that a golden *śivaliṅga* was carried on a palanquin (*śivikā*). There is no mention or depiction of other means of procession in inscriptions or temples’ illustrative carvings.

The Royal Monastery of King Jayavarman VII also celebrated *vasantotsava*, the “Spring festival,”<sup>89</sup> which precedes the full moon day of the month of Caitra (March–April). The festival’s procession was decorated with banners and parasols and accompanied by musicians and dancers. The images which were taken around were those of Bhagavān (i.e., the Buddha), Bhagavatī (i.e., Prajñāpāramitā), Vīra (i.e., Śiva), Śakti (i.e., Pārvatī), among other deities. If our identification is correct, the festival involved not only Buddhist but also Brahmanical deities. This hypothesis is supported by the mention of Buddhist monks (*bhikṣu*) and Brahmins (*dvija*) as the recipients of a donation during the festival.

Some common rituals for the Buddhist images included “consecration ceremonies such as the eye-opening rite that invited the deity into the sanctuary and image, ritual bathing of the images that resulted in merit, and the recitation of chants and hymns in the presence of the image.”<sup>90</sup> According to the inscription of Vat Kdei Car (K. 157), the three images of Lokeśvara and Prajñāpāramitā offered by King Rājendrarman to his courtier Vīrendravikhyāta were ritually bathed in a reservoir dug out by Vīrendravikhyāta.<sup>91</sup> Furthermore (according to K. 111), at the monastery founded by Kīrtipaṇḍita, a *purohita* (“priest,

<sup>88</sup> For example, a Viṣṇu’s image procession is mentioned in K. 356 (10th century) and K. 276 (11th century) and the procession of a *śivaliṅga* is known in K. 853 (9th century) and K. 1222 (13th century).

<sup>89</sup> Besides the above-mentioned expressions *niyatotsava*, *dvādaśotsava*, and *vasantotsava*, several inscriptions from the 9th to the 11th centuries mention three expressions: *pañcotsava* “five festivals,” *mahotsava* “grand festival,” and *śāstrotsava* “festival of treatise.” Although all of them are still to be identified, the term *pañcotsava* is used in Buddhist, Vaiṣṇava, and Śaiva contexts.

<sup>90</sup> Green, “The Vat Sithor Inscription,” 41.

<sup>91</sup> There were two images of Lokeśvara and one of Prajñāpāramitā.



officiant, Brahmanical sacerdotal minister”) conducted the ritual bathing, the eye-opening ceremony and the ritual sprinkling of the image(s) of the Buddha. Here, the term *purohita* has a Brahmanical connotation despite being used in a Buddhist context. The *purohita* performed also some tantric rituals using the two emblematic objects, viz., a *vajra* and a bell. Besides the *purohita*, there was another type of officiant called *yājaka* who performed the rites prescribed by the Buddha. As to Kīrtipaṇḍita, he was qualified as *ācārya* “teacher” and appointed as *guru* “teacher” by King Jayavarman V.

Many Buddhists in Cambodia around the 10th century are believed to have followed the *vinaya* (monastic code) of the Mūlasarvāstivādins.<sup>92</sup> The *vinaya* classifies *ācārya* into five categories: 1. *ācārya* of novice; 2. *ācārya* who interrogates the prospective novice in private during the ordination ceremony; 3. *ācārya* who is in charge of guiding community work, formal events and actions; 4. *ācārya* who is responsible for providing “support (*nissaya*)” to his pupils; 5. *ācārya* who provides instruction and reading.<sup>93</sup> There may be an *ācārya* carrying out more than one function, if not all of the five. Kīrtipaṇḍita belongs to the fourth or fifth category because he instructed and trained monks. Though it is quite common from a Buddhist perspective to accord the title *ācārya* to a scholar who imparted knowledge, the mention of the *ācārya*’s teaching and training duty in a Buddhist monastery is unique here, since the term *ācārya* in Cambodian inscriptions usually refers to “someone well versed in rituals, mostly Śaiva.” K. 370, for example, mentions four *ācāryas* installing four statues of the Buddha which bore the title *kamrateṅ jagat*. This title is commonly used in a Śaiva context. Aymonier, *Le Cambodge: le royaume actuel*, 154, rightly remarks that the Buddha and His relics were honored by a cult which borrowed considerably from the practices of Śaivism.

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<sup>92</sup> Snellgrove, “The Relationship of Buddhism to the Royal Brahmanical Cult,” cited by Green, “The Vat Sithor Inscription,” 152. Compiled around the beginning of the Christian era, the code has been partially preserved in Sanskrit among the Gilgit manuscripts, and integrally in Chinese as well as in Tibetan. It is enormous; its Tibetan version in, for example, the Derge edition is almost four thousand folios long and takes up thirteen volumes, and even it may not be complete (Schoepen, *Buddhist Monks*, 2). Like all *vinayas*, it contains a huge number of major rules and minor regulations meant to govern everything from ordination to how to use the latrine. For an analysis of the main chapters of the *vinaya*, see Shayne Clarke, “Vinayas,” in *Brill’s Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, vol. 1. *Buddhist Literatures*, ed. by Jonathan A. Silk (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 73–80.

<sup>93</sup> For an explanation of the five categories, see Green, “The Vat Sithor Inscription,” 153–154.

Furthermore, it is worth mentioning the term *brahmapuṇya* (for *brāhmapuṇya*),<sup>94</sup> which literally means “holy merit” and by extension refers to “a special and immense form of merit.”<sup>95</sup> The inscription warns that if one establishes a *vihāra* for one’s own livelihood, rather than for the benefit of others, and not for the sake of attaining tranquility, then there is no *brāhmapuṇya* in this place by which one might have attained omniscience. This use of the term *brāhmapuṇya* corresponds exactly to that in the Saṅghabhedavastu of the Mūlasarvāstivādinaya. According to the Saṅghabhedavastu, founding a *vihāra* where previously there was none, is one of the four ways to obtain the *brāhmapuṇya*.<sup>96</sup>

The Pali-Khmer inscription of Kok Svay Chek (K. 754) mentions two terms referring to rituals connected to the Buddha’s image in the monastery, viz., *vuddhayajña* “sacrifice to the Buddha” and *vuddhapūjā* “worship of the Buddha.” The terms *vuddhayajña* and *vuddhapūjā* are obviously interchangeable in the Pali and Khmer portions of the inscription. The Khmer portion mentions that a female servant was in charge of cooking for the *vuddhayajña*; this suggests that the *yajña* was a kind of cooked food to be offered to the Buddha as an act of worship. There was a male servant whose duty was to pluck the flowers, most probably to offer them to the statue as well. The Khmer portion continues stating, that the *vuddhapūjā* was to be performed by a male servant, namely Gaṅgāsarmā, who was assisted by five persons. These people might be identified with the *yājaka* “sacrificer” mentioned in the Pali portion. Gaṅgāsarmā, as Cœdès argues, was

<sup>94</sup> Green, “The Vat Sithor Inscription,” 30, 79–80, n. 53.

<sup>95</sup> “Brāhma-merit” is defined at Aṅguttara-nikāya 5.76 as merit which causes one to be born in heaven for a *kalpa* (Richard Salomon, “The Copper Plates of Helagupta: A New Edition and Study,” *Indo-Iranian Journal* 63 (2020): 24–25, n. 26). The term *brāhmapuṇya* is indeed well represented in the Mūlasarvāstivādin sources and seems to first appear in northwest of India (Vincent Tournier, personal communication, June 2021). A 5th–6th century inscription from Āndhradeśa mentions that: “[...] Brāhmapuṇya “Brāhma-merit” has been obtained through the foundation of many *mahāvihāras* that produced a brilliance rivalling with that of the residence of the gods.” (Vincent Tournier, “A Tide of Merit. Royal Donors, Tāmaparṇīya Monks, and the Buddha’s Awakening in 5th–6th-century Āndhradeśa,” *Indo-Iranian Journal* 61 (2018): 35–37).

<sup>96</sup> Green, “The Vat Sithor Inscription,” 79–80. For a detailed explanation with schism and expansion of the notion of *brāhmapuṇya* in Buddhist sources, see Albery, “Buddhism and Society,” 601ff.

probably an orthodox Brahmin.<sup>97</sup> This observation seems to be confirmed by the cult utensils offered to the monastery, which were identical to those used in Śaiva or Vaiṣṇava contexts.

## 7. Conclusion

Our study of *vihāras* in ancient Cambodia is in a sense a preliminary venture. The purpose of this paper is to present the relevant data and issues, rather than to argue any point in detail. In the light of the epigraphical and archaeological sources, we have discussed the physical aspects of the monasteries and their functions. Further study of the archaeological remains of the sites is needed. A comparative study first of Buddhist and non-Buddhist inscriptions of Cambodia, and then of Cambodian inscriptions and those of the wider region is also urgently required.

The term *vihāra* does not seem to exclusively refer to any form of architecture. It can be replaced by the synonym *mandira*, as in the case of the inscription of Ta Prohm (K. 273). Architecturally, a Buddhist and a Brahmanical monastery are similar and can be distinguished from each other only by the idols which were installed therein and by the carvings on lintels, pediments, walls, and galleries. The Royal Monastery of King Jayavarman VII housed many images of both Buddhist and non-Buddhist faiths.

Regarding their functions, the monasteries served three purposes, viz., a place of living, a place of study, and a place of worship. Some references to the Mūlasarvāstivādinaya have been found, especially through the use of the term *brāhmaṇya*.

The procession of the Buddha's images in different kinds of festival is comparable to the Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava practices. The images of the Buddha were treated exactly like those of Śiva and Viṣṇu, as the mentioning of certain cult objects suggests. The naming of the Buddha images with the honorific title *kamraten jagat*, though, suggests influence from local, pre-Buddhist practices.

Whether it was common among the people of pre-Angkorian and Angkorian times to designate their establishments as *vihāra* or *ārāma*, or in other terms, is not yet known. Nevertheless, all the *vihāras* mentioned in Cambodian inscriptions were Buddhist institutions. But the term did not always necessarily denote an entire monastery, as it could

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<sup>97</sup> George Cœdès, "Études cambodgiennes, XXXII : La plus ancienne inscription en pâli du Cambodge," *Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient* 36, no. 2 (1936): 20, n. 2.

also refer to only “a hall of Buddha’s statues” which formed part of a monastery.

In a 16th-century inscription from Vat Romlok (K. 27; Ta Keo, Pali and Khmer) the term *vihāra* is used to refer to the hall, whereas the term *ārāma* is used to refer to “the monastery.” This use has continued in the modern Khmer language. A monastery, which is now called Vatt,<sup>98</sup> consists of a *vihāra* which is generally situated in the center of the monastery’s premises and opens to the east, and of many huts (*kuṭi*) are located at the back and sides of the *vihāra*. It is not yet known when the term Vatt started to be used to refer to a “monastery” in modern Khmer. The term seems to appear for the first time in the hybrid Khmero-Pali inscription of Vat Nokor (K. 647, 1865 CE), in the compound *ārāma-vatta-cettiya-sathūpa-buddharūpa*, “the *cettiyas*, the stupas, the Buddha’s images in the monastery,”<sup>99</sup> in which the terms *ārāma* and *vatta* form a sub-compound meaning “the monastery.” According to Saveros Pou, the term *vatta* is of Khmer origin, from the Old Khmer term *vat* “to circle, surround.”<sup>100</sup> In Middle Khmer (15th–18th centuries CE), it has become *vāt* or *vatt* “closed space, territory of a temple or a monastery; hence Buddhist monastery.” When the term *vatta* started to be widely used to refer to a monastery, the term *vihāra* was reduced to the meaning “hall.” In the present-day practice, a *vihāra* is defined as a consecrated space, a hall in which the acts of the Community (*saṅghakamma*) such as ordination and the recitation of the basic code of monastic discipline (*pāṭimokkha*), are validated.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> In modern Khmer, the term *vatta* is also used as compound with the term *ārāma*, hence *vatta-ārāma*. The compound refers to “monasteries” whereas *vatta* alone refers often to “a monastery.” The term Vatt or Vat “monastery” is also used in Thai and Lao languages. In Burmese language, the term *vihāra* refers to monastery whereas in Mon, the term *bhā* is used, which is derived from *vihāra*.

<sup>99</sup> Saveros Pou, *Nouvelles inscriptions du Cambodge, tome I* (Paris: École française d’Extrême-Orient, 1989), 78–79.

<sup>100</sup> Pou, *Nouvelles inscriptions*, 79.

<sup>101</sup> Olivier de Bernon (personal communication, May 2021).

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Figures

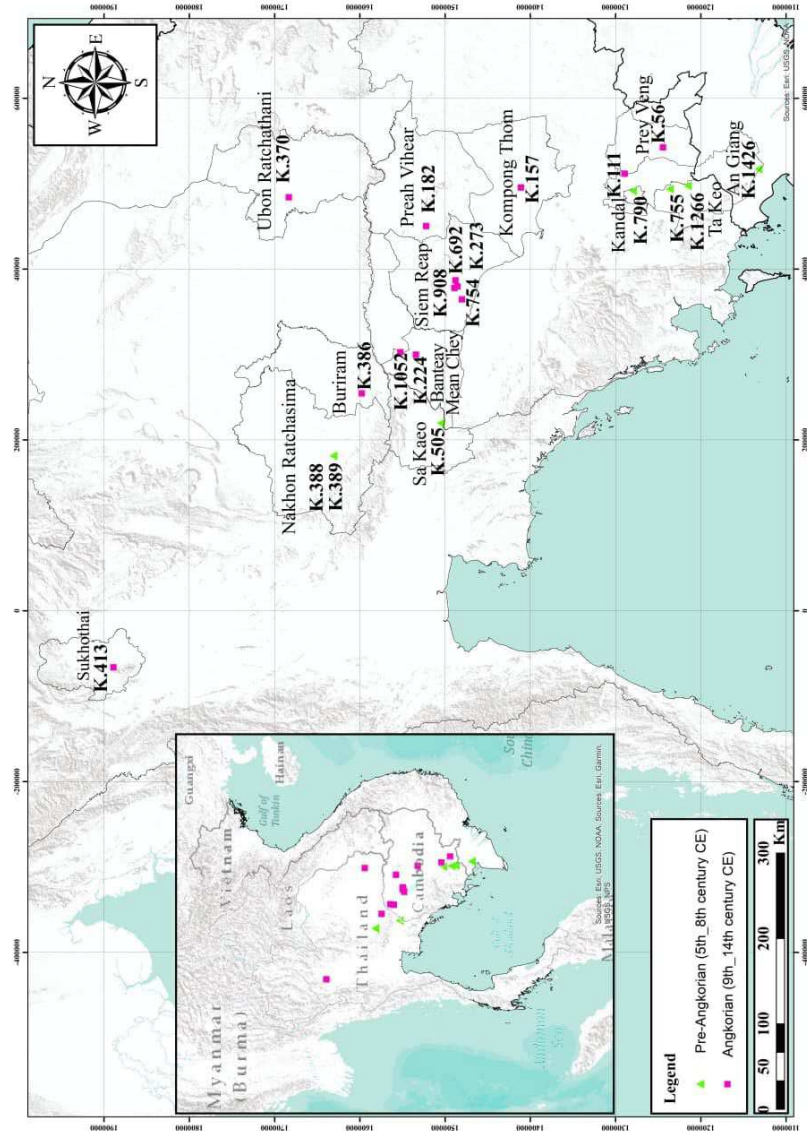


Figure 1. Map prepared by Pagna Muy showing the locations of the inscriptions which mention the term vihāra.

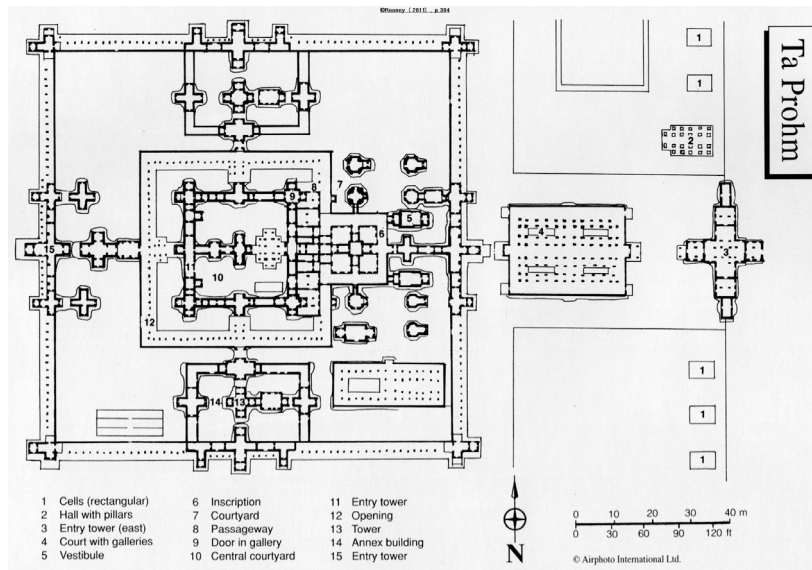


Figure 2. Plan of Ta Prohm Temple (Dawn Rooney, *Angkor, Cambodia's Wondrous Khmer Temples* (Hong Kong: Odyssey Books & Guides, 2011), 304).



Figure 3. Plan of Sukhothai Historical Park showing the vihāra of Prey Svay situated outside the west gate.





*Figures 4 & 5. Stupas and foundation of the brick hall of Prey Svay monastery.*

