



Angkor – Sacred Heritage of Cambodia
15 December 2006 - 9 April 2007

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Exhibition Dates

Duration	15.12.2006 – 09.04.2007
Director	Wenzel Jacob
Managing Director	Wilfried Gatzweiler
Exhibition curator	Wibke Lobo, Berlin Helen Ibbitson Jessup, USA
Project manager	Susanne Annen
Exhibition architecture	facts+fiction GmbH, Köln
Press officer	Maja Majer-Wallat
Catalogue / Press Copy	€28 / €15
Opening hours till 7 th January 2007	Sunday, Monday and Thursday 9 a.m. - 7 p.m. Tuesday and Wednesday 9 a.m. - 9 p.m. Friday and Saturday 9 a.m. - 10 p.m. 24 December 2006 9 a.m. - 3 p.m. 31 December closed
up to 8 th January 2007	Monday closed Tuesday / Wednesday 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. Thursday to Sunday 10 a.m. to 7 p.m.
Admission till 7 th January 2007 up to 8 th January 2007 Standard/Reduced rate/Family ticket	€12 (inclusive The Guggenheim Collection) €7,50 / €4 / €11
Public transport	Underground lines 16, 63, 66 to Heussallee, Bus route 852 to Ollenhauerstraße, Routes 610 and 630 to Heussallee
Press information	www.bundeskunsthalle.de Press file (German/English)
Guided group tours	Information and registration: Telephone +49 (0)228-9171-247 Fax +49 (0)228-9171-244 E-mail: paedagogik@kah-bonn.de
General information	Telephone +49 (0)228-9171-200 www.bundeskunsthalle.de (German/English)



Information on the Exhibition

Angkor – Sacred Heritage of Cambodia 15 December 2006 - 9 April 2007

On December 15, 2006, an exhibition of objects of art from Cambodia will be inaugurated in the Art and Exhibition Hall of the Federal Republic of Germany (on until April 9, 2007). This is the first time that Germany will be host to an exhibition of this scale displaying art which - ever since it became known in the mid-19th century - has fascinated the culturally interested public in Europe and filled them with wonderment. Since then, the name Angkor has stood for unfathomably vast, mysterious temples, spread out in the Cambodian jungle – temples that can even today evoke the splendour that was once theirs.

Ever since the country began to achieve political stability in the beginning of the 90s following the Paris Peace Agreement, the Angkor region has once again become accessible to travellers, and the public worldwide has become increasingly aware of the splendid culture of the ancient Khmer empire and its monuments, erected between the 9th and the 13th centuries. But what was the spirit behind these stupendous temples, which were the gods they were dedicated to, what was the social and economic structure that made their construction possible? What kind of a society was it that could bring forth such achievements? What was the self-image of its kings? These are some of the questions posed by anyone who wishes to get acquainted with ancient Cambodia.

And this is where the exhibition steps in. It not only provides the viewer the opportunity of gaining an overview of the diversity of art, but also takes up the most important themes in art history, so that the visitor gets an idea of the historical, social and religious context of the works.

Angkor formed the heartland of an empire that, at the height of its power, extended in the west across the Chao Praya (in present-day Thailand), in the east up to the Annamite Range (in present-day Vietnam), in the north up to the curve of the Mekong (in present-day Laos) and in the south up to the Cape of Camau (in what is today Vietnam). The lowlands by the Great Lake (Tonle Sap) where Angkor lies, are most suitable for rice cultivation. Trade was fostered by a variety of timbers and wild game together with gold, precious stones and silk, with the Tonle Sap and the Mekong providing access to the sea. Sound water management and an extensive network of canals regulated the irrigation of the paddy fields. It was in this environment, blessed with an abundance of natural resources, that the country developed into the most powerful empire in South East Asia.

Round 140 stone sculptures, bronze figures as well as silver objects and paintings will make their way to Bonn from the National Museum in Phnom Penh. In addition, objects on loan from the Musée National des Arts Asiatiques Guimet in Paris will also be on display at the exhibition. The timeframe covered will extend from the 7th century to modern times, for the exhibition aspires to show through the objects on display, the cultural base on which Angkor developed and the extent to which its legacy continues to resonate even today.

The earliest traditional works of art displayed at the exhibition are from the pre-Angkor empires of Funan and Chenla to the south and north east of present-day Cambodia. These are Buddhist and Brahmanical (Hindu) stone sculptures from the 7th and 8th centuries – objects of great beauty exhibiting an amazing degree of artistic perfection. They bear the distinct impress of Indian art and yet retain a style that is unmistakably their own. Sandstone stelae bearing inscriptions give an idea of the overriding importance of epigraphy for gaining insights into the age. It remains the most important source of information for all aspects of Khmer culture until the 14th century.

The real Angkorian period began in the 9th century when the centre of power was shifted to the west, close to the Tonle Sap. There the first temple mountain of stone, surrounded by wide moats and enclosing walls, was consecrated as the Empire's magico-religious centre. The complex was based on a cosmological



concept strictly followed right into the 13th century: as per this, the Earth was visualised as a square surrounded by mountain ranges (enclosing walls). Beyond this ring stretch the mythical primeval oceans (moats). In the centre of this square, Mount Meru, residence of the gods, forms the axis of the universe (temple mountain). The main temple was often surrounded by smaller shrines where statues of divinities were placed. Apart from architectural elements such as carved door lintels and balustrades, the exhibition will also include an impressive number of stone and bronze figures from these temples, some larger than life-sized. These are both Brahmanical and Buddhist cult statues, their styles exhibiting an extreme diversity ranging from imposing representation, elegant simplicity and vibrant vitality to profound spirituality. One of the most splendid objects on display is a bronze figure of the God Vishnu, which even in its fragmentary state is overwhelming. Clearly reflected in the style are the patrons' sense of life and role perception.

So typical of the art of Angkor, the bas-reliefs on the gigantic temple-mountain of Angkor Wat (constructed between 1113 and 1150), widely considered the most magnificent specimen of Khmer architecture, will receive special attention. Being immovable objects of art, these bas-reliefs can only be presented in segments on original-sized photo friezes and plaster casts. Transposed onto a substitute medium, they still succeed in providing an impressive display of the exuberant fantasy and artistic perfection that marks the representation of epic and mythical events.

Angkor witnessed its last great efflorescence during the reign of the Mahayana Buddhist king Jayavarman VII (1181-1220). The temples constructed under him are dedicated to the Buddhist ideals of compassion and wisdom. This is most clearly discernible on the face-towers which leave their imprint on the late Angkorian period as no other architectural feature does. Characteristic of this period is the inward smile on the monumental faces – Angkor's famous smile that also appears on the outstanding stone sculptures and bronze figures of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas on view in the exhibition. Unique among these is a head of polished sandstone portraying Jayavarman VII himself, an object of extreme rarity, for other than the few portraits of the king and presumably of his queen Jayarajadevi which have survived, we know of no representations of individual personages in Angkor.

Following the death of this important ruler, a period of stagnation set in, and in the 15th century, Angkor was completely abandoned by the Khmer kings. They founded a new capital in the eastern part of the country, close to the Mekong. Theravada Buddhism was now the state religion, with the stupa and pagoda forming the religious centre. In its Cambodian version (Reamker), the Indian epic, Ramayana, frequently represented in the Angkorian Period, continued to retain tremendous importance as a vehicle of spiritual knowledge. No longer chiselled on stone but painted on the inner walls of pagodas and repainted time and again, the Reamker influenced artistic creativity in Cambodia right into the 20th century. This important tradition is represented in the exhibition by a series of scenes from the Reamker, produced at the beginning of the 20th century in tempera on canvas.

Through the centuries, Angkor has remained the reference point for Cambodia's national identity. Till today, its legacy has a bearing on the self-perception of the Cambodians.

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Wall Texts

The Khmer Empire

The political history of early Cambodia is generally divided into three epochs: the Funan period (1st/2nd/3rd century – early 7th century), the Zhenla period (7th and 8th century) and the Angkor period (9th to 15th century).

None of these periods takes its name from designations authenticated by historical sources from the region. “Funan and “Zhenla” undoubtedly go back to Chinese historical records of how these periods were commonly referred to then. Angkor is a derivation of *nagara*, the Sanskrit word for city. Funan extended across the coastal areas of present-day Cambodia and the adjacent region of South Vietnam. Oc Eo was an important trading centre between China, South East Asia, and India. On the basis of archaeological findings, it is presumed that the capital of the country at the time lay in the vicinity of present-day Angkor Borei.

The decline of Funan set in once maritime trade in the 6th century began shifting to a more direct shipping route between Indonesia and China. It was at this point that the Khmer kings of the hinterland rose to power. The capital of the Khmers lay somewhat further north in the Mekong basin, close to the Sambor Prei Kuk of today.

Towards the end of the 8th and the beginning of the 9th century, the Khmer kings shifted their seat of power from its location on the north eastern fringes of the empire to the west, close to the Great Lake. In the 10th century, Angkor became the seat of the Khmer empire that now went by the name Kambujadeśa, the land of the descendants of Kambu, a mythical ancestor. Between the 11th and 13th centuries, the empire of Angkor had reached the zenith of its expansion to include large sections of present-day Vietnam, Thailand and Laos. The country's wealth, manifest in an abundant supply of commodities sought for trade throughout Asia – exotic woods, rare wild game and precious stones – its plentiful rice crops, facilitated by the ingenious use of its water resources, together with an inexhaustible supply of fish enabled the Khmer kings to pursue an ambitious building programme that saw innumerable temples being erected throughout the country. The most important temple complexes outside the immediate Angkor area are concentrated to the north and west of the Great Lake and in the Mekong basin.

In the 15th century the Khmer kings left Angkor to return to the eastern part of the country. The shifting of the capital to Phnom Penh was not only due to Angkor being too exposed and relatively close to the expanding power of the Thai empire of Ayutthaya, but primarily with an eye to securing better conditions for trade with China and control of river trade on the Mekong and the Tonle Sap.

The Formative Influence of Indian Culture

The earliest surviving artworks of the Khmer are from the 6th and 7th century CE. These early pieces are Brahmanical (Hindu) and Buddhist stone and wooden sculptures of great beauty, revealing an amazing degree of artistic perfection. They bear the strong imprint of Indian artistic traditions while at the same time displaying a style that is unmistakably their own. Even before the beginning of the Common Era, Indian influence had spread across the whole of South East Asia through trade contacts, this being particularly pronounced in the first centuries of the Christian era. Buddhism and Brahmanism, their mythology and sacred texts along with the two great epics, the Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata, were absorbed, assimilated, adapted to the local tradition and, ultimately, developed into an unmistakably distinctive culture. Sanskrit, the ancient Indian language whose appearance in pre-angkorian epigraphy can be traced back to the 6th century, was considered the sacred language par excellence. Most of the inscriptions carrying accounts of royal endowments such as temples and statues, or hymns to the gods and eulogies to the rulers, were written in Sanskrit right up to the beginning of the 14th century, in a Khmer script developed from a South Indian alphabet. At the same time, stone inscriptions in Khmer may be found from the 7th century onwards. The abundance of epigraphical material forms the most important source of information until the end of the Angkor period, for there are no other



texts that have been handed down. The dates mentioned in these epigraphical records are indispensable for chronologically placing the kings and the monuments they undertook. Furthermore, the inscriptions also provide insights into the social conditions of the day, presenting a vibrant picture of life at the time.

Khmer images of the gods most often portray Śiva, Viṣṇu and the powerful goddess Devī. Among the highly venerated deities are also Pārvatī (or Umā) and Lakṣmī, the consorts of the two gods, and the sons of Śiva, Gaṇeśa and Skanda.

The majority of the Khmer kings were devotees of Lord Śiva. His aspect as the Lord of Creation is represented by the Liṅga. This column-like shaft, rounded at the top, harks back to an earlier phallus cult and symbolises Śiva's ability to create life while at the same time embodying his highest form as the Absolute. Thousands of Liṅgas have been carved into the mountains close to Angkor, in rocky river beds, converting the rivers into the Indian Ganga, the river associated with Siva, so that the great God may render fertile the land of the Khmer.

Creation Myths

In Brahmanic (Hindu) religious texts the trinity of Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva embodies the three cosmic tasks: Brahmā creates the world, Viṣṇu preserves it and Śiva brings it to an end. Although theoretically regarded as equivalent aspects of one absolute and all-encompassing god, religious practice tends to accord pre-eminence to either Śiva or Viṣṇu, subordinating the other two gods to the preferred deity. However, both Śivaites and Viṣṇuaites respect the supreme god of the rival religious community. In the pre-Angkor period this mutual respect found eloquent expression in the images of Harihara, which fuse Viṣṇu and Śiva into a single, powerful deity.

The Śivaites revere Śiva as the creator of the world and lord of the universe. His accomplishments are embodied in the twofold symbolism of the liṅga, which represents not only the god's phallus in a potent allusion to his procreative energy, but also the god himself in his pure, absolute form. Viṣṇuaites on the other hand worship Viṣṇu as the creator of the world. The Viṣṇu creation myth is intimately bound up with the notion of a primal ocean from which all life is believed to have originated. Thus, in addition to their function as reservoirs for the irrigation of rice paddies, the enormous artificial lakes in Angkor are symbolic representations of the primal ocean. Viṣṇu is frequently depicted as floating in the waters of this cosmic sea, reclining on the back of the serpent Ananta whose name means 'without end'. In the fullness of time Viṣṇu brings forth a lotus from his navel, on the blossom of which Brahmā appears. It falls to Brahmā, the four-headed god who surveys the four cardinal directions, to set down the material world of time and space. This myth skilfully builds on the earlier tradition that saw Brahmā as the primary creator of the world and transforms it in Viṣṇu's favour. Similarly, the episode of Kṛṣṇa lifting Mount Govardhana is a key Viṣṇu creation myth, because Kṛṣṇa, an incarnation of Viṣṇu, creates a protected environment that makes life possible.

Images of the great goddess Bhagavatī Mahiṣāsura-mardani – shown here in one of the most elegant sculptures of Khmer art – are a common feature of the pre-Angkor period but rarely found in later years. Her battle against the buffalo demon Mahiṣa is a variation on the recurring complex of themes at the very heart of mythology, namely the eternal struggle of good against evil, light against darkness, order against chaos, life against death.

Residences of the Gods

Evidence of numerous temples dating back to the 7th and 8th century has survived in the ancient capitals of Funan and Zhenla, which were situated near today's Angkor Borei and Sambor Prei Kuk. Most of these temples were relatively small tower sanctuaries, erected on a square floor plan. The sanctum was generally open towards the east and housed an often astonishingly large stone statue of the god to whom the temple was dedicated.



The temples were made of fired bricks, but more durable sandstone was used for the lintels, doorjambs and the pilasters flanking the doors. The doorjambs tend to be inscribed, while the elaborately carved lintels are frequently decorated with lush tendrils springing from the mouths of monstrous water creatures. These tendrils might well be a reminder of ancient rituals that involved festooning the temples with garlands. Other lintels are decorated with figurative bas-reliefs depicting episodes from Indian mythology which underline the significance of the entrance to the sanctuary as the threshold between the sacred and the profane. The stylistic characteristics of these lintels are the principal means of establishing a chronology of the buildings, especially when there are no supporting inscriptions.

At the beginning of the 9th century, King Jayavarman II succeeded in uniting the different Khmer kingdoms. He moved the capital from its marginal position in the northeast of the country to a more central location just north of the Great Lake (Tonle Sap), which was to become Angkor. His successor Indravarman I (877 – 889) initiated an unparalleled building programme, at the heart of which lay ancestor temples, gigantic water reservoirs and the temple-mountain as the centre of the empire. These key architectural concepts set the standard for all successive Khmer kings and defined the pattern on which future Brahmanic as well as Buddhist temple complexes were built.

The Khmer kings built temples and artificial lakes not only as an expression of their power in this world, but also in order to achieve deification in the next. They sought to become one with the gods they venerated and thus achieve eternity in the Beyond. The overriding desire for permanence provided the impetus for ever larger and ever more lavish building projects. However, permanence could only be attained through piety and devotion to the gods. By erecting temples in their honour the kings hoped to accumulate a maximum of religious merit.

The Temple as the Image of the Cosmos

The sacral architecture of the Khmer is based on the conviction that there is a magical relationship between men and the universe, the microcosmos and the macrocosmos. It was believed that men are constantly under the influence of cosmic forces, and that their well-being depends on the extent to which they succeed in living in harmony with these forces. Thus, while building a temple, importance was given to creating an exact replica of the macrocosmos. The cosmological concept followed by the Khmer, which harks back to older Indian concepts, perceives the earth as a square surrounded by mountain ranges. Beyond this belt of mountains is the endless expanse of the mythical ocean. In the very centre of the square rises Mount Meru, the axis mundi. At the microcosmic level, the temple replicates this structure. Its basic form is also square. It is surrounded by a moat – the mythical ocean – its enclosing walls symbolise the mountain ranges, while its five towers may be understood to represent the five-peaked Mount Meru on which the gods reside. For the devotees the complex is a Maññala. In stepping across the moat, crossing the enclosures and climbing the multi-tiered temple by the axial stairs, the devotees embark on a spiritual path to realisation, their ascent culminating in the vision of the deity in the inner sanctum.

The colossal temple-mountain of Angkor Wat is considered the most splendid creation of Khmer architecture. It was presumably constructed during the reign of Suryavarman II between 1113 and approximately 1150 AC. This project could be accomplished only through a perfectly functioning hierarchy headed by a brilliant planner who conceived the design, a well-structured middle rung of technicians and organisers who coordinated the individual work phases and a broad base of experienced craftsmen and artisans. The dense network of irrigation canals spread across the entire country was also used as waterways, enabling the rapid transportation of building materials from the quarries to the construction site.



Measuring 187 × 215 meters at its base, the temple rises in three levels to a height of 65 meters. Axial flights of steps lead from one level to the other. Stairways are also provided in each of the corner pavilions. Galleries enclose the terraces on the outside, their corners ending in cruciform pavilions. Beehive-shaped, horizontally tiered towers rise over the middle and upper levels. Inner courtyards extend between the galleries. At the very top of the temple mountain, broad rows of columns lead from the all-round gallery to the cruciform sanctuary that encloses the square cella.

Buddhism in the Pre-Angkor Period

Buddhism and Brahmanism (Hinduism) were certainly known in South East Asia as early as in the first centuries of the Christian era. Inscriptions and objects of art that have survived both from Funan as well as Zhenla from the 6th century onwards have confirmed that both religions were practised side by side, with Brahmanism presumably playing a more important role. It has so far not been possible to clearly ascertain which school of Buddhism had been followed, the Small Vehicle (Hīnayāna) or the Great Vehicle (Mahāyāna).

The majority of the objects of art represent the Buddha as an itinerant preacher – a form known from India since the 1st century AC. Shown wearing a simple garment without any jewellery, the Buddha here bears some of the marks of a “Great Being” that include a coiffure of snail-curls twisted to the right and, most importantly, the cranial protuberance which marks the most sacred part of the body and is therefore the source of all wisdom. The lotus on which he is shown seated or standing, reflects his state of absolute purity as the Enlightened One; for the lotus, whose long stem rises to the surface from the muddy bottom of the lake, making its way through the purifying waters to open its white or pink blossom in the sun, symbolises clarity of mind and detachment from all that is worldly. Represented for the most part in these sculptures is the Buddha Śākyamuni, the wise one of the Śākya clan, a historical figure who lived in the 5th - 4th century BC in Northern India and preached the doctrine of the Four Noble Truths of suffering and the Eight-Fold Path for the annihilation of suffering, with the aim of overcoming the cycle of rebirths and attaining Nirvāṇa. After his death the Buddha passed into Perfect Nirvāṇa. Once he has reached this state, he cannot directly influence man, but his teachings together with his exemplary life remain shining examples to his followers, spurring them on and showing them the way to the right path. Once on this path, they receive concrete help from the Bodhisattvas, beings who have already attained enlightenment but relinquish Nirvāṇa out of compassion for man. Thus they help men cross the “ocean of rebirths” by protecting them during times of hardship and danger and showing them how good karma can be amassed.

There were frequent representations of the Bodhisattvas Avalokiteśvara and Maitreya in the pre-Angkor Period.

Divine Plurality

“There is only one god, but he has many different aspects.” This Hindu credo lies at the heart of the unparalleled diversity of divine images created in India and the countries that adopted Indian religions. In Kambujadeśa, as the Khmer empire was known in the Angkor period, the two great gods Viṣṇu and Śiva dominated religious life until the end of the 12th century, and their cults formed the very foundation of kingship. Remarkably tolerant, the Angkor period kings promoted not only Śivaite and Viṣṇuaites, but recognised and supported Buddhism as well.

Śiva and Viṣṇu have the ability to present themselves to their devotees in a wide range of different manifestations, depending on which aspect of their all-encompassing nature is appropriate for the specific location, situation and need of the believer. Mirroring the life of their devotees, the gods have extended families and are accompanied by their faithful sacred mounts.



Śiva represents first and foremost the spiritual perfection and transcendent knowledge of the free spirit that is not hemmed in by any conventions. Viṣṇu on the other hand embodies the ideal of pragmatic common sense and the benign rule of law and order. Their apparent antagonism reflects the irresolvable dichotomy of human life: the desire for permanence and the experience that all life on earth is subject to the endless cycle of growth and decay.

Governed by a set of time-hallowed iconographic conventions, every detail of a divine image is endowed with specific meaning. Hairstyle, jewellery and attributes identify the god's character and function. Thus, Śiva's tresses are those of an ascetic striving for enlightenment, and Viṣṇu's tall crown indicates that he looks after the welfare of the world. The number of heads and arms of a god is directly proportional to his ability to deal with his manifold tasks. In an eloquent demonstration of his omnipresence, Brahmā's four heads allow him to survey the four points of the compass. His four mouths simultaneously recite the four Vedas, the ancient and sacred foundation texts of Hinduism.

In addition to the images of gods that are revered in temples and shrines and that occupy the mythical scenes on lintel reliefs, the Angkor pantheon is further enlivened by a rich and varied host of semi-divine beings. And indeed, the beautiful *apsarās* flanking doors and windows, and the hybrid animal-shaped guards watching over the stairways to the sanctuaries endow the austere architecture with vitality and elegance.

The Bas-Reliefs of Angkor Wat

Every tier of the massive temple mountain is enclosed by galleries. At the lowest level the almost five metre wide galleries feature a double row of columns that buttresses the corbel-vault of the roof and forms a two meter wide corridor between columns and inner wall. This inner wall is decorated with the famous stone reliefs that skirt the entire temple complex. At a height of some two metres and a length of 544 metres the friezes cover a staggering 1088 square metres. The relief is so shallow that the carvings have often been referred to as "frescoes in stone". And indeed, the Angkor period pilgrim may well have perceived them as wall paintings, as many parts were once painted. The unusual shallowness of the relief means that the busy scenes of the frieze do not disrupt the clear lines of the architecture – one of many sophisticated devices that distinguish the temple. Stairways leading up to the higher levels along the two central axes of the temple divide the frieze into eight sections.

J. Poncar and his team of the "German Apsara Conservation Project" have photographed the entire frieze in the slit-scan technique and captured each section in a single, long negative. The section shown here is part of the almost 100 metre long frieze of the epic battle between gods and demons that decorates the west wing of the northern gallery. It is a remarkable *tour de force* of unbroken narrative that leaves not a square centimetre of stone uncarved. The gods are conceived as the personifications of the human ideals of lawfulness, beauty and justice. The demons on the other hand are the embodiment of chaos and everything that threatens civilisation. It is this primordial conflict between the two forces of good and evil that engenders the ups and downs of the world. At times the gods have the upper hand, then again they come close to being defeated by the demons. It is always Viṣṇu who in the nick of time performs the decisive action that saves the day and re-establishes justice on earth.

The frieze is divided into a series of heroic hand-to-hand duels between a god and a demon, with the remainder of the available space taken up by the frenzied *mêlée* of foot soldiers, riders and charioteers of the armies of good and evil.



The three plaster casts from the Museum of Indian Art in Berlin were made in 1986 from paper moulds acquired in Cambodia at the end of 19th century by the then Royal Museum of Ethnography, Berlin.

Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna Buddhism

A few decades after the completion of Angkor Wat the Khmer empire experienced a profound religious transformation. Though Brahmanism and Buddhism had coexisted for centuries, most Khmer rulers had been followers of Śiva or, to a lesser degree, of Viṣṇu. By contrast, Jayavarman VII (1181 – c. 1218) was a devout disciple of Mahāyāna Buddhism. He established it as the state religion, and the many buildings erected under his rule were devoted to the Buddhist ideals of compassion and wisdom. This is most evident in the face towers of the Bayon temple that have left a more profound mark on the late Angkor period than any other architectural phenomenon. The serene smile on the monumental faces, the famous Angkor smile, conveys the deep spirituality that characterises the style of the period.

The iconic image of the Buddha on the serpent throne rose to unprecedented prominence. It represents the absolute perfection and cosmic quality of the enlightened spirit. The serpent may also refer to the Śivaite concept of Kuṣṇalinī Śakti. This conflation of Brahmanist and Buddhist ideas is the result of the close association of the two religions in the late Angkor period. Moreover, the serpent had long been worshipped by a number of local cults that Buddhism sought to integrate. Aside from the Buddha, devotees looked to the bodhisattva Lokeśvara, the lord of the world, for spiritual guidance on their path across the “ocean of rebirths” towards nirvana. Lokeśvara epitomises the Buddha’s infinite compassion for all living beings. The king who identified with the bodhisattva wholeheartedly embraced the responsibility of looking after his subjects. It is said of Jayavarman VII that he suffered more acutely from the afflictions that affected his subjects than from his own, that he regarded the pain of the people as the pain of kings. Unique in Khmer art, the portrait statues of Jayavarman VII convey a powerful sense of the great king’s personality.

In addition to Mahāyāna Buddhism, Vajrayāna Buddhism (also known as the Diamond Vehicle) must have had a sizable following under Jayavarman VII. This path to enlightenment places great emphasis on the meditation on maṇḍalas. The numerous deities depicted in maṇḍalas are personifications of various aspects of the Buddha’s nature that are inherent in everyone and therefore attainable. One of the most important gods of the Vajrayāna school is Hevajra whose dance demonstrates that the process of enlightenment is an inner struggle between the forces that cling to the things of the world and those that want to let go and be set free.

Theravāda Buddhism in the Post-Angkor Period

In the early 14th century Theravāda Buddhism – the form of Buddhism prevalent in Sri Lanka and the Thai kingdom of Ayutthaya – took root in Cambodia and quickly gained popularity at every level of the population. In the 15th century, after a long transition phase, which was marked by frequent Thai attacks and the temporary occupation of Angkor by Thai forces, the capital was finally abandoned in favour of a more eastern and less exposed site in the region of today’s Phnom Penh. The position on the confluence of the Tonle Sap and the Mekong and the closer proximity to the sea provided ideal conditions for the overseas trade with China. Though no longer a commanding empire, the country was still rich, and its mineral resources, precious wood and rare game were highly desirable trade goods.

Inscriptions document the transformation of Angkor Wat into a Buddhist sanctuary in the 16th century. The great temple became a destination for pilgrims from all over Southeast Asia, from the 17th century even from Japan. The sweeping galleries sheltered numerous Buddha statues,



many of which continued to be venerated by the local population well into the middle of the 20th century.

Theravāda Buddhism is characterised by its near exclusive devotion to the Buddha Śākyamuni. The gift of a Buddha statue is one way of acquiring religious merit, or good karma, and of improving the odds for a better reincarnation. To this day, enormous numbers of Buddhas of all sizes, and to suit all financial abilities, are produced in Theravādin countries. Statues of different centuries and uneven artistic merit are frequently found side by side on the altars of Theravāda pagodas, serving the devotees as meditation aids and inspiring role models. Their aura of benign, dignified serenity conveys the inner strength of the enlightened Buddha.

At the beginning of the 18th century, Cambodian artists began to adopt Siamese (Thai) artistic conventions of representing the Buddha in ornate robes instead of the more traditional simple garb of an ascetic. Strictly speaking, this amounts to a contradiction in terms, as the Buddha had renounced all luxury and embraced poverty as a path to greater spirituality. Some of the ornate Buddhas are regarded as representations of the future Buddha Maitreya, venerated throughout Cambodia as the coming redeemer. He is believed to reside in the Tuṣita heaven awaiting the coming of a powerful king at whose side he will re-establish Cambodia's former glory.

From the *Rāmāyāna* to the *Reamker*

One of the two great Indian epics, the *Rāmāyāna* appears to have reached Southeast Asia as early as the 6th century AD. It has spawned a wide variety of local versions and enjoys undiminished popularity to this day. The story follows the heroic exploits of Prince Rāma, his banishment to the wilderness and the abduction of his beloved wife Sītā by Rāvana, the demon king of Lanka. The major part of the poem is devoted to the epic battles braved by Rāma and his brother Lakṣmaṇa in order to free Sītā from the clutches of the demon king. The brothers have a powerful ally in Hanuman, the general of the army of monkeys. Finally, after countless setbacks and difficulties Rāvana is killed and Sītā, the epitome of the faithful wife, is freed.

In its myriad subplots and embellishing episodes the intensely moral story deals with all the exemplary and despicable aspects of human emotions, passions and behaviour. Rāma is cast as the valiant hero, while Rāvana represents the epitome of villainy. Their fight symbolises the universal conflict between good and evil. Rāma, an incarnation of Viṣṇu, triumphs over Rāvana, because good must ultimately prevail over evil. Countless stone reliefs on the temples of Angkor illustrate the enormous significance of the *Rāmāyāna*.

Written down in the 16th or 17th century, the Cambodian version of the epic, the *Reamker* (or *Rāmakerti*), adapted the story to suit the tenets of Theravada Buddhism. It casts Rāma (Khmer: Preah Ream) in the role of a bodhisattva who has attained enlightenment but who altruistically postpones accession to nirvana in order to help others find the right path. Thus the epic retained its unsurpassed value as a compendium of religious knowledge and a beacon of ethical and moral standards. Wall paintings of episodes from the *Reamker* in Buddhist pagodas all over Cambodia testify to the extent to which the dramatic events leading up to Sītā's liberation have shaped Cambodian art well into the 20th century.

A heartbreaking example of the undiminished significance of the epic tale is the fate of a young woman who was imprisoned and murdered by the Khmer Rouge. Identifying with the heroine of the *Reamker*, she had signed her anguished love letters to her husband with the name Seda (Sītā). Tragically, her hope to be rescued by her husband was not fulfilled.



Preview 2007
subject to alteration

Art Students Display Their Works
18th Federal Competition

9 February – 11 March 2007

For the seventh time the Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle offers young artists studying in the Federal Republic of Germany a forum. The exhibition is intended to create opportunities for comparison and to stimulate discussion, whilst providing an interested general public with an insight into work currently being done at art schools in Germany.

Egypt's Sunken Treasures

5 April 2007 - 6 January 2008

An exhibition of the KAH in collaboration with Franck Goddio and the Hilti Arts & Culture GmbH. This exhibition was made possible by the generous support of the Hilti Foundation.

French underwater archaeologist Franck Goddio explored the seabed off the coast of the modern city of Alexandria in Egypt and in the Bay of Abukir for ten years and discovered magnificent artefacts of Egyptian history dating from 700 to 800 A.D. These objects sank into the sea as a result of a series of natural disasters. Monumental statues as well as coins, jewellery, and cult items were located with state-of-the-art techniques and then salvaged through years of hard, painstaking work. Legendary locations such as the ancient port of Alexandria with its royal quarters, the long-lost city of Herakleion and remnants of the city of Kanopus have been rediscovered. Approximately 500 artefacts from these spectacular underwater excavations will be shown in Bonn. These objects offer insights into 1,500 years of Egyptian history from the last of the Pharaohs to Alexander the Great and the Greek rulers on the Nile up to the Roman era. Their uniqueness also reflects the prestige of the three cities, once famous centres of commerce, science, culture, and religion. Influences from Greece and Rome merged with the several-thousand-year-old culture of the Pharaohs. The result was the emergence of new religious and cultural ways of life that powerfully shaped ancient Egypt. This exhibition also provides a glimpse into the fascinating work of divers and underwater archaeologists.

The exhibition "Egypt's Sunken Treasures" celebrated its world premiere in the summer of 2006 in Berlin's Martin-Gropius-Bau as a great success. Over 450,000 visitors saw the exhibition in less than four months. An extension in Berlin, however, was not possible. The Art and Exhibition Hall is now offering interested parties another chance to experience "Egypt's Sunken Treasures" up close.

Russias Soul

17 May - 26 August 2007

Icons, paintings and drawings of the Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow

In 2006 the State Tretyakov Gallery will be celebrating its 150 anniversary: In 1856 Moscow businessman Pavel Tretyakov (1832 – 1898) purchased his first painting of a contemporary Russian artist, laying the foundation for his famous painting gallery. Today his gallery is regarded as the most important collection of Russian art in the world. Around 170 outstanding paintings, icons, and drawings will be selected from this rich collection for the exhibition in Bonn. This exhibition will trace the development of Russian art as it charted its unique course between the pan-European tradition and its own cultural tradition. The paintings range from the courtly culture of the late eighteenth century to the avant-garde movement around 1917.

The focus of the exhibition is on the latter half of the nineteenth century. During this eventful period all of Moscow was seized by an unprecedented painting fever. The influential collector and art patron Tretyakov especially admired the young generation of realist painters such as Ilya Repin, Ivan Kramskoy, Vassily Polenov, Nikolai Ghe, to name a few. Their social critical scenes of life in Russian society, lyrical landscapes, and penetrating portraits are masterly expressions of the fervent and much evoked search for the 'true Russia'. Introducing this extensive group of works are seldom shown paintings from the eighteenth and early nineteenth century. A selection of exquisite icons also provide insight into the spiritual sources of Russian aesthetics. The upheavals that characterised the turn of the century are manifest in the rich diversity of artistic positions, beginning with the symbolism of Michael Vrubel and Victor Borissov-Mussatov and extending to the representatives of Russian modernism.

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Press

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