

# The Flying Palaces of Angkor

## The History and Mythology of Cambodia's Magnificent Temples.

by Shaun MacLoughlin

As there are up to 3 million tourists a year to Angkor Wat, the income from this venture should be considerable. The purpose is to devote a proportion of the royalties to Cambodian Charities for Education, Hospitals, Mine Victims, Cambodian Artists, etc, etc.

Shaun has co-directed an English language play in Vietnam, working with a Vietnamese Assistant Director and Choreographer and leading actors and dancers. Please see The Healing Arts. For international reviews please look at UN Peace Meditation Group. He aspires to repeat his success in Cambodia, with Cambodia's outstanding creative artists, actors and dancers. Having been a BBC producer for 30 years in the UK, USA, Australia and France, he understands what will appeal to a Western audience.

### **The Script of The Flying Palaces of Angkor**

#### **The Principal Players**

1. Maha Eysei, the Old Sage, who sees the past, the present and the future.
2. Kambu, the Prince Ascetic from India, who doubles as Jayavarman II, Suryavarman I, etc.
3. Mera, the greatest of the Apsaras, who doubles as Sita from The Ramayana. If we can find an outstanding Apsara dancer, who can also perform the English speaking role of Mera, this would be a great bonus. She will also play Queen Jayavarman.
4. The Dragon Princess and Fishing Cat.
5. Naga, the Dragon King, doubles as Indravarman, Genghis Khan, Kublai Khan, etc.
6. The Brahmin Priest doubles as The Buddhist Monk.
7. Zhou Da Guan, the Chinese Chronicler.
8. The boy, who will become Jayavarman VII.

#### **Notes**

1. These actors will assume many different roles as the play progresses.
2. Dancers and extras will also perform many roles, manipulating props, bands of silk, etc.
3. Musicians will sometimes be visible.
4. The back projected images will often have a hypnotic quality.
5. The screen on which they are projected will occasionally also act as a shadow puppet screen.
6. Apsara Dancers will either be creatively integrated into the action, or there may be some short Apsara dance interludes, illustrating for example relevant excerpts from The Ramayana or from The Churning of the Sea of Milk.
7. The Clarity and Attraction of the English Spoken Word, both technically and in the training of the actors, will be supremely important.

#### **The stage is backed by a large screen that will serve two purposes:**

1. Back projection for images.
2. Shadow puppet screen.

## THE PROLOGUE

### Music 1. "Prologue"

*On the screen we see a map of the turning world. As the globe comes to rest over South East Asia we zoom in to Cambodia, to the Tonle Sap, to many temples, which appear to fly out of the sky to land on the earth.*

*Fade music and we hear the voice of Maha Eysei (who acts as narrator, in time with the above moving graphics)*

MAHA EYSEI: Welcome to Cambodia, to the great inland sea the Tonle Sap, to the Flying Palaces of Angkor and to the greatest of them all, the largest religious building in the world, Angkor Wat.

*We see a spear thrown - dramatically - at a particular spot, out of which merges the magnificent temple of Angkor Wat.*

We shall explain the meaning of the spear, a vital part of the many creations myths of Cambodia and we shall tell you of the legends, the religion and the history of one of the world's greatest empires.

### Music 2. "Homage to Buddha and the Hindu Gods"

*In the half light the players enter in simple white shirts and coloured Kben (traditional pantaloons), with coloured sashes at the waist. Some of them carry leather cut outs of figures of Maha Eysei, Shiva, Preah Ream and Reab and place them either side of the screen. Then they line up in V formation, kneel, place candles on the ground before them and bow with their backs to the audience.*

*We pay homage to the Lord Buddha, To Vishnu, God, Protector and Patron of the Arts And to Shiva, Destroyer, Creator and God of the Dance. In time with the above, out of the darkness a back projection of the Buddha mixes to an image of Vishnu, mixes to an image of Shiva.*

*These images are from temple carvings and bas-reliefs, chosen to take us back through the religious history of Angkor.*

*We might also have an image of the twelfth century bronze statuette of the Tantric Hevajira, Baphuon, 11th century Bronze.*

### Music 3 "Creation"

*KAMBU, a magnificent young man enters.*

MAHA EYSEI: Honour self created Kambu.  
(Invoking) He descends from the conjunction of the sun and of the moon.  
And his glory rises like a star at the horizon.  
He dispels ignorance.  
He is accomplished in all the arts.

*The worshippers leave with their candles and all of the leather cut outs except for that of Maha Eysei. Then there is back projection of aerial shot of Angkor Wat mixing to images of flying Apsaras. Out of this appears Mera, a most beautiful Apsara. For the moment she is still, not unlike a stone carving herself. She is dressed in white.*

MAHA EYSEI: I honour Mera, the most glorious of celestial women,  
(Invoking) whom Shiva gave on high as Queen to this wise man.

*The cut out of Maha Eysei is removed to reveal Maha Eysei down stage left.*

MAHA EYSEI: (He turns and addresses the audience.)  
These invocations are taken from a tenth century, Sanskrit poem, inscribed on the temple of Baksei Chamkrong. The names Kambu and Mera are merged into Kambumera or Kampuchea or, as it called in English, Cambodia. Kambu was the first of the God Kings of Cambodia.

*Mera, the leading Apsara, is joined by six other Apsara dancers dressed in the traditional red, blue and green. They give a short dance.*

MAHA EYSEI: Mera is one of the heavenly women known in Cambodia as apsaras. These divinities are models of perfect femininity, and also of the dance.

*More dancing.*

MAHA EYSEI: A later God King, King Rajendravarman re-established the empire at Angkor in 944 A.D. To celebrate he planted a gold statue of Shiva on the summit of the temple pyramid of Baksei Chamkrong. In this way he paid respect to his ancestors, Kambu and Mera.

*Pause. Mera and the other Apsaras leave the stage. Kambu remains.*

## THE CREATION OF CAMBODIA

MAHA EYSEI: But allow me to introduce myself. I am Maha Eysei, the ancestral guardian of the performing arts. I see the past, the present (he smiles) and I see the future.

### Music 3. Battle Music

MAHA EYSEI: There are other, even earlier creation myths told by the small eyed people of the jungle, who worshipped snakes.

*In synch with the following we picture the southern gopura - or tower gate - of Angkor Wat and zoom into the image described.*

*Out of this we have a martial arts display in which Kambu now comes to life and fights these Amazon warriors, finally signifying his victory by placing a spear in the ground (recalling the image from the opening sequence).*

MAHA EYSEI: In one version, you can see carved on the southern gopura - or tower gate - of Angkor Wat, an Indian hermit defeated an army of female warriors. He then planted his spear in the ground to mark the spot where he would found a kingdom.

### Music 4. Jungle Music

*Noises of the jungle. Some small natives creep forward stage left with foliage to represent the jungle to worship the Naga Dragon, who appears out of the jungle accompanied by his daughter, the Dragon Princess. She divests herself of her scaly serpent's body and tail to reveal herself in beautiful human form, but with a cobra head dress.*

MAHA EYSEI: In a similar version of the creation myth they say that the daughter of the Naga, the great serpent God of the Jungle, could manifest herself as a human being.

*Other dancers from stage right manipulate bands of blue and green material to represent the waves of the sea. Other, male Dancers appear with boats fixed to their waists (taken from a popular Khmer folk dance) to create the picture of Kambu in a boat. Similarly female dancers create the picture of the Dragon Princess paddling out to meet him. Kambu takes a bow and arrow and shoots it into her boat. (This will be done by special effects).*

MAHA EYSEI: One day Kambu, a Prince and a hermit from India, was led by a dream to the shores of a great lake, the Tonle Sap. He was armed with a magical bow. The Dragon princess paddled out to meet him. He fired an arrow into her boat. She was so impressed by his marksmanship that she fell in love with him.

*Back projection of Rama shooting a bird through the spokes of a wheel.*

MAHA EYSEI: This reminds us of the contest in which Rama the incarnation of Vishnu shot a bird through a moving wheel and won the hand of the beautiful Sita. For the Cambodians, myth, legend and history are intimately interwoven. The back projection fades to image of Naga and the actor playing the Naga addresses Kambu.

*The back projection fades to image of Naga and the actor playing the Naga addresses Kambu.*

NAGA: For the sake of peace in my household, we will overlook your crime in coming here. We shall arrange your marriage.

NAGA: How dare you invade my land? I should have you put to death.

KAMBU: I come to ask for help.

NAGA: Explain yourself.

KAMBU: In my country I was King, but Shiva, the destroyer, caused a great drought and destroyed our crops. My people are desolate. My wife is dead.

NAGA: My daughter has fallen in love with you.

DRAGON  
PRINCESS: You have pierced my heart.  
(Almost a threat) I desire you.

NAGA: For the sake of peace in my household, we will overlook your crime in coming here. We shall arrange your marriage.

KAMBU: And we shall build a kingdom that will be a stepping stone to heaven. We shall call it "the Flying Palaces of the Holy City"

NAGA: (laughs) What on earth do you mean? How can palaces fly?

KAMBU: Please don't mock me.

NAGA: Explain yourself.

KAMBU: In my country, in the Himalayas, we have a holy mountain. We call it Mount Meru. It has five peaks. The tallest in the centre reaches to heaven.

*The Naga looks out to sea - the waving green and blue silk bands - as if he is trying to visualize it.*

NAGA: Is it surrounded by the sea?

KAMBU: It is. We build palaces in the shape of Mount Meru and there in the topmost chamber, after our Kings die, they fly to heaven in these flying palaces; and there they become Gods.

PRINCESS: We shall build such a flying palace in Cambodia.

NAGA: It shall be as you say.

PRINCESS: We shall be father and mother to a new nation.

*Kambu presents the Dragon Princess with beautiful costumes and jewellery, which her maids help her to adorn herself with.*

MAHA EYSEI: This is why today the Cambodians say they are "born from the Naga" and Khmer weddings symbolize the beautiful legend of the origin of Cambodia when Kambu the first Khmer prince married the Naga princess. Before their marriage Kambu gave her clothes and jewellery to wear.

*The Dragon King makes a great movement and a sucking noise (electronically magnified). The material representing the sea is whisked past and behind his face. The lighting also creates the effect of water disappearing.*

MAHA EYSEI: And in exchange her father enlarged the possessions of his son-in-law by drinking up the water that covered the country, So that the people could grow rice; and with the wealth created from rice, he built a capital for Kambu and his daughter. Today we Cambodians see ourselves as the offspring of a marriage between "culture" and "nature".

Music 5. Marriage music which segues into cultivating and sowing music.

*We may mime, dance a brief marriage ceremony here. This to be decided after consultation with our Khmer cultural expert/ choreographer. The natives come forward and make obeisance to the married couple.*

MAHA EYSEI: To be a true King one had to be a Cambodian and an Indian at the same time. The inscriptions on the Angkor temples are in both Khmer and Sanskrit, the ancient language of India.

*The dance continues with the natives miming sowing and gathering rice.*

## THE CHURNING OF THE SEA OF MILK AND THE FERTILITY OF ANGKOR

MAHA EYSEI: (Continued) Sanskrit was the language of the superior caste, the consumers, who kept order and who ruled; while Khmer was the language of the producers who grew rice and who fished in the Tonle Sap.

Music 6. Dramatic Churning of the Sea of Milk Music.

MAHA EYSEI: Whenever Mother Earth has needed help, the superior caste had called on the God, Vishnu to restore peace and order, as he had during the Churning of the Sea of milk, when the Gods had to regain the elixir of immortality.

*The Dragon King, the Princess and the natives unwind a long snake like rope. The following may also be choreographed by dancers. Images from Angkor Wat will illustrate the following, including the wonderful carvings of the chopped up fishes.*

MAHA EYSEI: To obtain this heavenly drink, they took the Great Naga, as a rope, twisted it around the world-mountain, Mandara, as the pivot and started churning the sea which frothed like milk.

Ninety two asuras - or demons - pulled on the head of serpent and eighty eight devas - or demi-gods - pulled the tail. Realizing that thousands of years of work were unsuccessful, they sought the help of Vishnu. He advised them to work together and to organize themselves.

But at this point Mount Mandara suddenly began to sink and Vishnu, in his incarnation as the tortoise Kurma, had to support the mountain with his shell, while Indra squeezed down the top of the mountain with his foot. The spinning of the mountain caused such a violent whirlpool that the fishes around it were torn to pieces.

The sea of milk was churned for another thousand years and then, to the delight of the gods, the heavenly nymphs or apsaras were born of the waves and finally they created the Amrita, the much desired elixir of immortality.

And so Kambu married the Dragon Princess - or he married Mera. (smiles)  
Perhaps he married both.

*Meanwhile Mera has entered again on the other side of Kambu to the Dragon Princess.*

*Kambu and the Dragon Princess leave the stage. Some back projections of the Churning of the Sea of Milk bas reliefs from Angkor Wat, and of more apsaras flying above them.*

MAHA EYSEI: Mera was the greatest of the Apsaras, sometimes called Lakshmi. You can see thousands of these apsaras on the walls of Angkor Wat.

*For the first time Mera speaks. Please note we need an excellent dancer who can also act and speak excellent English.*

Music 7. Khmer Classical Dance, illustrating the following:

*At this point we might have a few steps of a classical dance by other dancers while she explains.*

MERA: The Apsaras guided the Kings of Angkor on their journey to become Gods. But while they were still on this earth each year the Kings would conduct a ceremony to ask the heavens for help when the country faced floods, droughts, wars, and diseases. Girls were trained as dancers and divine spirits would possess these dancers. And when the dance was concluded, the prayers of the king would be granted. These dances also symbolized the connection between heaven and earth.

*Time allowing Mera might join the dance. As the dancers conclude and leave the stage, Mera continues:*

MERA: (Continued) It is not only the apsaras who can fly. Our temples too are flying palaces. Let me explain. (She smiles at Kambu, as if he too might be the object of her story) There was once a young Cambodian prince, who was so beautiful and so perfect, that the God Indra, living on Mount Meru in the sky came to earth to abduct him. We might mime or even dance this with Indra and the Devatas and with Nanda, the sacred ox. To be discussed. After a while the Devatas, the female goddesses, complained of his smell.

*(Kambu looks a little put out. We now have a succession of stills of Angkor Wat)*

MERA: To placate the Devatas, Indra had to have the Prince sent back to earth. However to comfort him, he had a palace, exactly like the one in the sky that the prince appreciated so much, built by the celestial people. The location was decided by Nandi the sacred ox of the God Shiva. It became the temple of Angkor Wat.

*Kambu and the dancers leave. We mix from back projections of stills of Angkor Wat to the Kulen hills, to gushing water, to the linga and yoni under the water of Kbal Spean.*

*It would be good to have a video of the water flowing over them to illustrate its life collecting power.*

MAHA EYSEI: Our temples are purified by the waters of the sacred Siem Reap River, rising in the Kulen Hills.

Here at K'bal Spean the waters flow over the life giving images of Vishnu and Shiva and draw fertility from the phallic symbols of Shiva and from the yoni of his consort.



## THE EARLY HISTORY OF ANGKOR

MERA: In Cambodia history and religion are intimately connected. (She smiles at the audience, but in Apsara tradition without showing her teeth.) Indeed can history or religion be true without the other? What do you think?

*Kambu enters again, but he has made a quick change and now he is vested in a king's robes to become King Jayavarman II. He is joined by a Brahmin priest, retainers, the Queen, concubines, apsaras and retainers. (We need to research how we mime this. There may be an appropriate coronation dance)*

Music 8. Coronation Music.

MAHA EYSEI: So let us travel back in time to the beginning of the first great age of Cambodia. In AD 802 King Jayavarman II, occupied the Kulen hills to the north of Angkor. Here by the Brahmin, the holy Hindu priest, Jayavarman was proclaimed:

BRAHMIN PRIEST: Chakravartin !

MAHA EYSEI: Universal Monarch. Some believe he came from Java in present day Indonesia; others that he came from the Cham people in present day Vietnam.

JAYAVARMAN II My name, Jayavarman, means "protected by victory". I have conquered many peoples.

MAHA EYSEI: He later established himself at Hariharalaya, dedicated both to Shiva and to Vishnu. This was 13 kilometres east of Angkor at present day Ruluos.

*Jayavarman leaves the stage (to make another change of costume) Indravarman, another warrior-like king appears. These Kings should be majestic and spectacular, so that this section does not seem like a history lesson. The Brahmin takes up the story.*

BRAHMIN: There his nephew Indravarman, meaning protected by the God Indra, was to fulfill three conditions of royalty. On ascending the throne he proclaimed:

INDRAVARMAN: In five days I shall begin to dig a great lake.

*Back projection stills of a great Baray, of Preah Ko and of Bakong in time with following:*

BRAHMIN: So first he built Indratataka, the first great Baray or inland sea, to surround Mount Meru, the mythical home of the Gods.

INDRAVARMAN: And then I shall build a temple to Shiva.

MAHA EYSEI: Secondly in 880 AD he built Preah Ko, an ancestral temple dedicated to Shiva. Shiva was also the title of his uncle Jayavarman II after his death. Thus the Kings are seen as becoming Gods.

INDRAVARMAN: And I shall build Bakong.

BRAHMIN: And finally he built Bakong, the first great temple mountain, the stairway to heaven, where the cult of the God King was practiced.

#### Music 8. Martial Arts Dance

*We hear the sound of a fierce battle. If we have time we have a martial arts display, which can also weave in and out of the ensuing battles.*

BRAHMIN: Indravarman made many conquests. In battle, which is like a difficult ocean to cross, this lion among kings raised a pathway, made up of the heads of his arrogant enemies; his troops passed over it.

*Back projection showing demons losing a battle from the south side of Bakong temple's fourth tier.*

MAHA EYSEI: The King was a God and of course his enemies, either Thais or the Cham people from South Vietnam were seen as Asuras or demons. His dominions extended into North east Thailand where an inscription tells us he was "a lion among kings".

*Indravarman leaves the stage.*

## THE BUILDING OF THE ROYAL PALACE AND SEDUCTION BY THE NAGA PRINCESS

*An extra enters dressed as Yashavarman.*

MAHA EYSEI:           Indravarman's son Yashovarman, protected by glory, was the first to establish the empire at Angkor by the Siem Reap, a river, as holy to the Khmer as the Ganges is to the Indians. He constructed a state temple, a new Mount Meru on the artificially flattened off summit of Phnom Bakheng that many of you climb to admire the sunrise or sunset.

BRAHMIN PRIEST:     He was a cosmopolitan King, aware of the grandeur of Indian civilization and tolerant of different religious beliefs. He built a hundred hermitages.

*Yashovarman leaves the stage. The actor who played Kambu and Jayavarman enters now as Suryavarman I.*

MAHA EYSEI:           The next truly memorable Emperor Suryavarman I, protected by the sun, gained the Empire through conquest. He made his 4000 officials swear an oath of allegiance, sealed with blood.

SURYAVARMAN I:     If you break this oath, you will be reborn in the 32nd hell, as long as the sun and the moon shall last.

MAHA EYSEI:           He reigned from 1011 to 1049 and was one of Angkor's greatest builders. He built the West Baray, the great artificial lake 5 miles long and one and a half wide. He also built the vast Royal Palace at Angkor Thom. The Empire was administered from here for centuries to come.

*Zhou Daguan, the Chronicler in traditional Chinese dress, walks onto the stage for the first time. He will look completely different from the other characters. He bows.*

MAHA EYSEI:           Within its walls he built the Phimeneakas, the state temple, whose topmost chamber only he could enter. According to Zhou Daguan, the 13th Century chronicler and Chinese ambassador to Angkor:

ZHOU DA GUAN:     A nine headed Naga snake-woman dwells in its golden tower. Every night the King moun sleep with her.

*He bows again and leaves.*

Music 10. Eerie Seduction Music.

*The Dragon Princess enters and confronts Suryavarman. She is wearing a nine headed snake head dress and a dragon cloak, which she removes during the following speeches to reveal the beauty of her womanhood.*

PRINCESS: Do you wish your kingdom to thrive?

SURYAVARMAN I: I do.

PRINCESS: Do you wish for a long reign?

SURYAVARMAN I: I do.

PRINCESS: Do you wish to stay alive tonight?

SURYAVARMAN I: I do. Why do you ask?

PRINCESS: I am the Naga, the serpent princess. I am also the energy contained in water. Without me your holy lake will turn to desert. Your rice will shrivel. Your people will perish.

SURYAVARMAN: (Wishing to escape) I must go to my wife. It is time to visit my concubines

PRINCESS: Stay! Only I can give you the water of life. Without me you too will shrivel and die.

*By now she has revealed that she is a startlingly beautiful woman.*

PRINCESS: Every night of your reign you must sleep with me - before you can go to your wife or to your concubines. Come now - to the Golden Tower. Together we shall replenish the earth.

*She takes him by the hand. The screen is drawn back to reveal some steps upstage, which they mount and disappear as the screen returns.*

## **THE BOY WHO WOULD BE KING**

MAHA EYSEI: Another of the greatest of the God kings, who ascended the throne almost a hundred years later in about 1113, was Suryavarman II.

*The actor who played Indravarman re-appears in resplendent, martial uniform as SURYAVARMAN II. We shall find some stills to reflect the following as Suryavarman talks of himself in the third person.*

SURYAVARMAN: I left the ocean of my army on the battlefield and leapt at the enemy King. I killed as a garuda on the slope of a mountain might kill a snake.

SURYAVARMAN enters his chamber, removes his head-dress and lies down:

MAHA EYSEI: It has been said that one night an unexpected visitor stole into King Suryavarman's private chamber at the summit of the palace. This time it wasn't the Naga Princess.

*A small boy, the future JAYAVARMAN VII, enters. If the staging allows we might see him climbing towards the King before the King sees him. He throws himself down, prostrate before SURYAVARMAN.*

MAHA EYSEI: The boy avoided the guards by climbing up the side of the building. He was brave and kind and wanted to help a friend.

SURYAVARMAN: (Starting awake) Who are you?

BOY: I am only a child.

SURYAVARMAN: How did you get here?

BOY: I climbed.

SURYAVARMAN: Have you damaged the paintwork?

BOY: I took care, Great King. I am small and light. I do not come for myself, King, but for another.

SURYAVARMAN: Whose son are you?

BOY: Yours . . .

SURYAVARMAN: What ! ?

BOY: Yours in spirit, for I have grown up in your house, but my father is Dharan Indravarman. He serves as a small king in the northeast.

SURYAVARMAN: I know him. You can sit up. I want to see your face.

The boy does so

SURYAVARMAN: What makes you think you are not in a lot of trouble?

BOY: You are a universal King. You have faced great dangers. You have no need to frighten me.

SURYAVARMAN: (Growls) You are troubling my sleep.

*The boy bows and crawls forward.*

BOY: King. You set up new temples, and you give them land and water and parasols and oil and wax and people. You are very generous

SURYAVARMAN: Yes?

BOY: There is a slave girl. Her name is Fishing Cat. She was honoured to be made part of our household when she was five. She is so happy to be here, she has not thought of her village since. She does not even remember its name. But I have checked the records and I see she must have come from near Mount Merit.

SURYAVARMAN: Well?

BOY: If . . . If that is where you are planning a temple, then perhaps if she is sent there, that would be a good thing. She could see her family again.

SURYAVARMAN: Is that all you want?

BOY: I have been foolish. I became friends with her. It was easy for me, it was fun. I had no thought of the danger for her. It is my fault, but she is the one being punished.

SURYAVARMAN: (smiles) You climbed up here for a slave girl?

BOY: (sompiahs) My guru says I must learn humility.'

SURYAVARMAN: (chuckles) A strange way to show humility, to wake up a king and make demands. But you have a brave heart, a good heart, to care for a slave girl. All right. I will order it.

BOY: (making sure the King doesn't forget) Her name is Fishing Cat. She lives near Mount Merit.

*The King laughs and stands up.*

SURYAVARMAN: I won't forget, little fellow. No need to climb down again. Come along, I will get you past the guards.

BOY: Don't punish them.

SURYAVARMAN: (laughs) I won't punish them. (PAUSE) Can I tell you who you are? Your father is my first cousin. Your mother was from the same pastures as my family. So I am fond of your family, that is why I asked especially for you to be here.

BOY: That is why I said you are my father.

SURYAVARMAN: I will remember you as the boy with the good heart. You know the greatest pleasure in being King? It comes when you know you have done something good.

BOY: Yes. Yes. That must be the greatest pleasure. That would be the whole reason to be King.

SURYAVARMAN: Yes, but bees make honey, only to lose it. Are you good with a sword, young prince?'

BOY: I'm better with a bow. Better with a crossbow on an elephant's back. Swords or arrows, the thing is to have a quiet spirit when you use them.

SURYAVARMAN: I want to train you specially - in the art of war.

*The Boy bows and climbs back the way he came. Suryavarman also leaves.*

MAHA EYSEI: The King's heir was Yashovarman, but it is said that this boy was his favourite. We shall meet him again.

## **THE TEMPLE, TOMB AND OBSERVATORY OF ANGKOR WAT**

*A series of back projections of Angkor Wat, illustrate the following.*

MAHA EYSEI: Meanwhile Suryavarman's devotion to Vishnu led him to commission the most beautiful, the most mysterious of the monuments of Angkor, the temple, tomb and observatory now known as Angkor Wat. This was completed after his fifty year reign in 1150. (He smiles) You will realise by now that there are many accounts of the creation of this the largest religious building in the world.

BRAHMIN  
PRIEST: Here the Khmers built a tower to reach the throne of God. Visitors enter from the West, the direction of death; but by walking east towards Mount Meru, the shrine of Vishnu, they move back towards the beginning of time.

MAHA EYSEI: We believe the Khmers can never die while the towers of Angkor Wat reach up towards the low hanging stars.

BRAHMIN  
PRIEST: Before laying the foundations, excavation was made to a considerable depth and filled with sand. The temple is spiritually activated by being built on 'pure' soil. And it is surrounded by holy water.

MAHA EYSEI: Anything that was not to honour the gods was built of wood or perishable material. Even the king's palace; because men's bodies are mortal and will cease to exist one day.

BRAHMIN: The Gods however are immortal and thus stone is used to honour them forever.

MAHA EYSEI: And its thousands of metres of carvings told the history of the Khmer people, their tribulations, their battles, their victories, their ceremonies, their daily life - and often it told these in the form of stories from Indian mythology as adapted by the Khmers.

*On the back projection show some carvings of the story of the Reamker.*

MAHA EYSEI: Let us take for example the story of the Reamker. It is depicted on the walls of Angkor Wat and later on the walls of the Bayon another great temple.

Music 11 for Shadow Puppet performance of Reamker

*The following speeches will be interwoven with highlights from the Shadow puppet performance of the Reamker and with Khmer Classic drama-dance and with back projections of reliefs of the Story of Rama from Angkor Wat and from the Bayon. Note the speeches may be modified in the light of the drama dance.*

BRAHMIN  
PRIEST: The Reamker is the Cambodian version of the Indian Epic the Ramayana, which tells of the triumph of good over evil. According to a 7th Century inscription many Cambodians recited the Reamker every day.

*During the following speech start with a shadow puppet, then a couple of dancers wearing masks, who then remove them.*

MAHA EYSEI: In ancient times performers did not dare to show their bodies to the public. First they used shadow puppets. Then they wore masks. Finally they dared truly to reveal themselves and to act on stage.



## THE GREATEST OF KINGS: JAYAVARMAN VII

*A series of back projections illustrate the following.*

- MAHA EYSEI: In 1181 the boy we met earlier ascended the throne as the greatest of all Angkor's Emperors, Jayavarman VII. The Reamker was seen as an illustration of his life.
- BRAHMIN: Like Rama, Jayavarman had been unjustly exiled and had had to fight evil forces, the Chams of present day Vietnam, who were regarded as asuras or demons. Jayavarman had to be victorious in battle before he could return to Angkor. Sita in the Reamker, the Cambodian version of the Ramayana is the symbol of Cambodia and the King must set her free. Jayavarman set not only Cambodia free from the Chams but it is said he set free his Queen and also Fishing Cat, his no. 1 concubine, who had been his friend from childhood.

*The above passage will be adapted in the light of the Reamker dance.*

*A brief resume by Maha Eysei, explaining the relevant passages to a western audience, will be added.*

*We shall also need to leave time for the actor playing the Brahmin priest to make a quick change into the Buddhist monk.*

*Bridge into the following:*

*Enter QUEEN JAYAVARMAN (played by the actress who plays Mera) and the BUDDHIST MONK. They burn incense.*

- MAHA EYSEI: It is said that Jayavarman's Queen was both a great beauty and a devout Buddhist and that she converted him to Buddhism. So Jayavarman was both a great builder and a devout Buddhist. He built the huge square shaped capital, Angkor Thom, three kilometres on each side.
- JAYARVARMAN VII: I will be known as Jayavarman, the great builder. I am lord of the temple that is like no other; the temple that is history in stone. My face will greet those who come to the city for a thousand years. My face is the four noble truths.

*Back projection, mixing from one to another of the four faces on the southern gate of Angkor Thom.*

MAHA EYSEI: In Buddhism there are four stages on our journey from attachment to this world to our escape from suffering. These are known as the four noble truths.

Some say that the four huge faces over the South Gate to the City of Angkor Thom are the faces of Buddha, representing these four noble truths. Others that they are the four faces of Siva. And yet others that they are the faces of Yashovarman: frightening his enemies to the South, outside the city walls; meditating on birth and death to East and West; and finally loving and protecting his people to the North within the city walls. You can see how different his expressions are.

It is said that he had many wives and concubines. This was not unusual, even for devout Buddhist emperors.

*His first Concubine, FISHING CAT (played by the actress who plays the Naga Princess) enters with several other ladies who might be other Queens and concubines.*

MAHA EYSEI: Legend has it that his chief concubine was Fishing Cat, the slave girl he had rescued as a boy.

*Fishing Cat takes Jayavarman on one side and whispers in his ear.*

MAHA EYSEI: She was cunning and fiercely loyal always watched her master's back, as he won many battles both in war and in diplomacy to become Angkor's greatest emperor.

*The Queen and Fishing Cat then smile at each other.*

MAHA EYSEI: Most remarkable of all, it is said that the Empress and Fishing Cat loved each other.

*Jayavarman steps forward and addresses the audience.*

JAYAVARMAN VII: I am Jayavarman the bringer of the new way. I build walls to protect the city and I build love in the hearts of the people. Angkor Thom will become a city of compassion, a shining star to the rest of the world.

*Jayavarman and the women leave as Zhou Daguan enters.*

MAHA EYSEI: Angkor Thom was described a century later by Zhou Daguan, the Chinese Ambassador. He assumed that the four great faces above the southern gate were those of the Buddha.

ZHOU  
DAGUAN: It has five gates. Outside the wall stretches a great moat across which access is given to the city by massive causeways. Flanking the causeways on either side are fifty four divinities resembling war lords in stone, huge and terrifying. They grasp nine headed serpents, seemingly to prevent their escape. Above each gate are grouped five gigantic heads of Buddha, four of them facing the cardinal points of the compass, the fifth head brilliant with gold holds a central position. On each side of the gates are elephants carved in stone.

*We see back projections of how these temples are today and illustrations as to how they might have been at the time of Jayavarman VII.*

MAHA EYSEI: Jayavarman also built the huge monastery temple of Ta Prohm, where Hindu holy men were given cells next to Buddhist monks. It received the revenue of over 3000 villages.

He built the university temple of Preah Khan with over a thousand teachers and at the centre of Angkor Thom, he built the magnificent temple of Bayon.

It is said that the Bayon is the manifestation in stone of Buddha's greatest miracle, when to convince unbelievers he created infinite images of himself, rising tier upon tier to the eighth heaven.

Music 12. Music for Apsara Gestures.

*Mera appears with four other apsaras. They give a very brief dance and then Mera speaks to make a point. There will be back projections of carvings of dancing Apsaras from the Bayon and other temples.*

MERA: Every stone of the Bayon is alive with dancing apsaras offering flowers to the passer by. When the apsaras dance they connect heaven and earth.

*The Dancers demonstrate the following Apsara hand gestures.*

MERA: Intricate hand gestures express belief. When you put your hand flat and your four fingers together and tuck your thumb to the front, that is belief.

If you put your finger into a point, that represents a tree, and when the tree grows up, it has leaves. And if you put your thumb and your index finger together and spread the other three fingers apart, that is the flower. So the tree has the flower. And then, fruit: when you put your thumb and the middle finger and form a circle and then you put the three other fingers backward, the tree has fruit.

And when the fruit get ripe it drops, and when it drops the seed just falls into the ground and grows up as a tree again. These are just the four basic hand gestures that embody the meaning of the circle of nature, the circle of life.

*Mera and the apsaras leave and we then see many stone reliefs from the Bayon to illustrate the following.*

MAHA EYSEI: Also on the Bayon, we can see a series of historical battles on land and sea. The clothes and arms of the Khmer and their enemies, the Cham, are shown in great detail. The most important people are mounted on elephants. The marchers are given timing by means of a gong. The boats are long and low with high ornamented prows and battle is engaged by bumping one another. These engagements are directed by the King living in the palace. He is waited on exclusively by women. To amuse himself he plays chess or watches the performances of dancers and wrestlers and gladiators. Dancers and wrestlers in Cambodia today behave in the same way.

*We return to images of the Buddha and Jayavarman and the Buddhist monk enters.*

BUDDHIST MONK: Jayavarman had been about 50 when he ascended the throne. He had lived in exile in Vijaya, the Cham capital and had then conquered the Chams and regained Angkor in a great naval battle on the Tonle Sap. Perhaps, influenced by his devout wife, he wished to atone for his past sins. He showed compassion to his subjects and built many roads, rest houses, and the northern baray or artificial lake on which he swore an oath.

JAYARVARMAN VII: By virtue of this good work may I help all beings who are plunged in the ocean of existence. And may the kings of Cambodia who come after me, attached to goodness, attain with their wives, dignitaries and friends the place of deliverance where there is no more illness.

*He walks off stage.*

## GENGHIS KHAN, KUBLAI KHAN AND THE DECLINE OF ANGKOR

MAHA EYSEI: But the sea of life is ever changeable.

*GENGHIS KHAN enters to the sound of galloping and whinnying horses, the sound of clashing swords and the screams of women and children.*

MAHA EYSEI: After the death of Jayavarman in about 1210, the empire was beset from without by conquest. Genghis Khan had terrorized and subjugated most of Asia.

*Out of the Sound effects of war, we mix to :*

Music 13. Drums, Pipes and Danger

GENGHIS KHAN	The greatest joy a man can know is to conquer his enemies and drive them before him. To ride their horses and to take away their possessions. To see the faces of those who were dear to them bedewed with tears, and to clasp their wives and daughters in his arms.
--------------	---

Fade Music

MAHA EYSEI:	Fortunately for Angkor, Genghis Khan's Mongol soldiers could not ride their horses through the thick jungle and they were liable to catch tropical diseases in the warm and humid south.
-------------	--

Short reprise of music.

MAHA EYSEI: But the threat remained because other peoples were also driven south.

Fade Music again.

MAHA EYSEI: Meanwhile there was another threat from within in the form of a vast Hindu reaction against Buddhism. Tens of thousands of Buddhist statues were defaced and destroyed. Nobody knows exactly who was responsible for this destruction or why, especially as Buddhism and Hinduism had co-existed so peaceably for so many centuries. It remains a meaningless mystery.

BUDDHIST  
MONK: It is important to keep in mind that Hinduism and Buddhism have been interwoven throughout history. Guatama Buddha is held by Hindu thinkers to be an avatar of the God Vishnu. Even today in Cambodia the gods Indra, Vishnu and Siva are considered to be protectors of Buddhism.

MAHA EYSEI: King Jayavarman VIII who reigned from 1243 to 1295 may have presided over most of this destruction.

#### Music 14. Suitably Imperial

*The large and luxurious figure of Kublai Khan is carried on in a palanquin.*

MAHA EYSEI: However there was the beginning of an even greater threat from outside in the form of Kublai Khan the grandson of Genghis. What he lacked in physical vigour he made up for in cunning.

KUBLAI KHAN: I shall found a new capital of the world and I shall call it Beijing. I shall found a new Chinese dynasty and I shall extend my dominions to the South and to the East. I shall send an ambassador to the Khmer Kingdom to demand obedience. Meanwhile I enjoy drama, let the play continue.

MAHA EYSEI: Jayavarman VIII showed good judgment in his dealing with the threat of Kublai Khan's general, Sagatu, who in 1283 was poised on the Cham frontier. The king avoided war by paying tribute to him.

ZHOU DAGUAN: For long years this country had enjoyed commercial relations with us. When the Holy Mongol Dynasty received its august mandate from heaven and extended its power over all four seas, and when the Generalissimo Sotu had set up his government in Champa, the Son of Heaven sent forth to Cambodia a Centurion bearing the standard of the tiger, but he was taken prisoner and never heard of again.

#### Fade Music

MAHA EYSEI: There is no record of what happened to the ambassador. Perhaps he was executed by Jayavarman VIII, who was lucky to avoid retribution. But by this time the Mongol Empire, as well as the Khmer empire, was in decline.

In 1294 Jayavarman VIII was overthrown by his son-in-law, Indravarman III, who had been on the throne for only a year, when in 1296 Zhou Dagan's embassy came to Angkor. They were sent by Tamburlaine the grandson and successor of Kublai Khan.

Zhou Dagan describes the last days of the Khmer Empire. His is the only written record apart from inscriptions upon stone that survive. The Khmer used to write upon palm leaves. Unfortunately these have all disintegrated.

Dagan gives a vivid picture in his report, *The Customs of Cambodia*:

*Some Khmer ladies appear.*

ZHOU  
DAGUAN: Everyone with whom I talked said that the Cambodian women are highly sexed. One or two days after giving birth to a child they are ready for intercourse: if a husband is not responsive he will be discarded. When a husband is called away on matters of business, they endure his absence for a while; but if he is gone as much as ten days, the wife is apt to say, "I am no ghost; how can I be expected to sleep alone?"

Not only do the women have strong sexual impulses, but it is they who are the best traders. For this reason a Chinese, arriving in the country, loses no time in getting himself a mate, for he will find her commercial instincts a great asset.

MAHA EYSEI: However perhaps like the decline of the Roman Empire, another of the world's greatest empires was coming to an end. There could be several reasons for this. Some say that Angkor was too far from the sea and no longer well placed for the growing international trade, in spite of the women's astute commercial sense.

*The ladies leave and Buddhist monks enter.*

MAHA  
EYSEI: By this time Buddhism had reinstated itself once more. The Buddhist monks were now of the southern Theravada tradition introduced from Sri Lanka

ZHOU  
DAGUAN: Worship of the Buddha is universal. The monks shave the head, wear yellow robes, bare the right shoulder, knot waist and go barefoot.

MAHA  
EYSEI: Many reasons have been suggested for the decline of Angkor. Some say the more egalitarian spiritual teachings of Theravada Buddhism undermined the hierarchical structure of Khmer society and the political power of prominent Hindus.

Others say that Jayavarman VII's massive building program eventually exhausted the kingdom's resources; and that the irrigation system that sustained Angkor's highly productive agriculture could not be properly maintained. At the same time, Angkor's vassal states began to assert their independence, no longer paying tribute into Angkor's treasuries. And yet others say that defending Angkor from frequent invasions by the neighbouring countries resulted in a huge loss of manpower.

Speaking as a Mongol, Zhou Daguan did not have a high opinion of Khmer soldiers at this time.

ZHOU  
DAGUAN: Soldiers move about unclothed and barefoot. In the right hand is carried a lance, in the left a shield. They have no bows, no arrows, no slings, no missiles, no breastplates, no helmets. Generally speaking, these people have neither discipline nor strategy.

*Zhou Daguan leaves the stage. Kambu and Mera enter.*

Music 15. Soft and Magical music that slowly builds from here to the grand finale.

MAHA EYSEI: And so Angkor Wat disappeared into the jungle, until, Westerners like to think, it was "re-discovered" by Henri Mahout, the French explorer in 1860. In fact from its fading glory until its present resurrection, it has remained a practicing Buddhist temple.

MERA: In the forests are the ruins of our cities. In the valleys of the rivers and in the great dry plains are the bones of our people. Our Kingdom is dust and ashes and desolation.

KAMBU: But our glory will return. Some day there will come from across the sea a man of a new race to take up the thread of our story, to restore our cities and to make Angkor once more the marvel of the world.

MAHA EYSEI: Perhaps he will be the friendly Buddha of the future who will come to purify the world and to teach the Dhamma when the Buddha's teachings have fallen into disuse.

*(See picture of Maitreya recognized by the stupa in his headdress.)*

## **EPILOGUE: A STEPPING STONE TO HEAVEN**

*Here to be discussed and planned with the Choreographer will be the Grand Finale Dance, a brief summation of many of the elements from before - and on the back projection screen the temples will return to heavens, from where they appeared at the beginning.*

MAHA EYSEI: And once more Angkor will be a wonder of this world and a stepping stone to heaven.

**THE END**

**Please note that you will find illustrations at**

**<http://www.learned.com/teachers/teacher-courses/tertiary-drama/tertiary-drama-01/>**