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**DISCOVER**

the facts hidden  
in plain sight  
at Angkor



# The Ancient Secrets of a Royal Triad DECODED

*Jayavarman, Indradevi and Jayarajadevi*

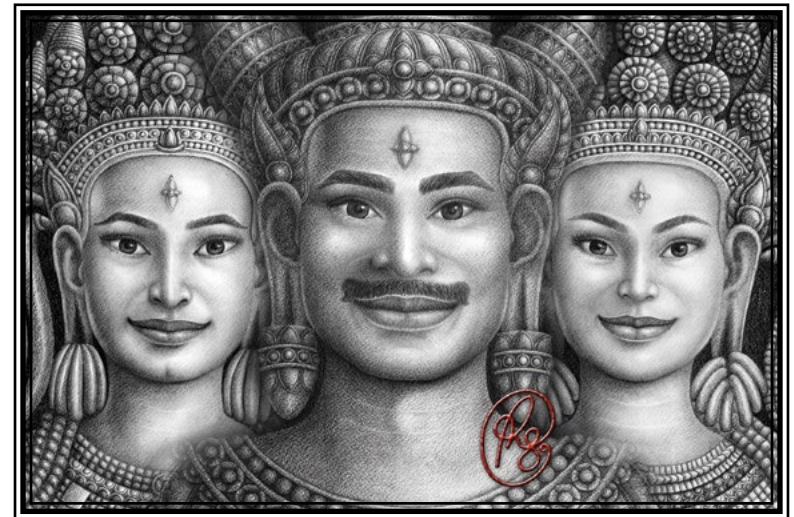
PhalikaN

**Angkor, Cambodia**

## The Ancient Secrets of a Royal Triad

**DECODED**

*Indradevi, Jayavarman and Jayarajadevi*



**Phalika Ngin**

**A Modern Relic in Pencil Art of the Royal Triad**

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*Bayon, Angkor Thom*

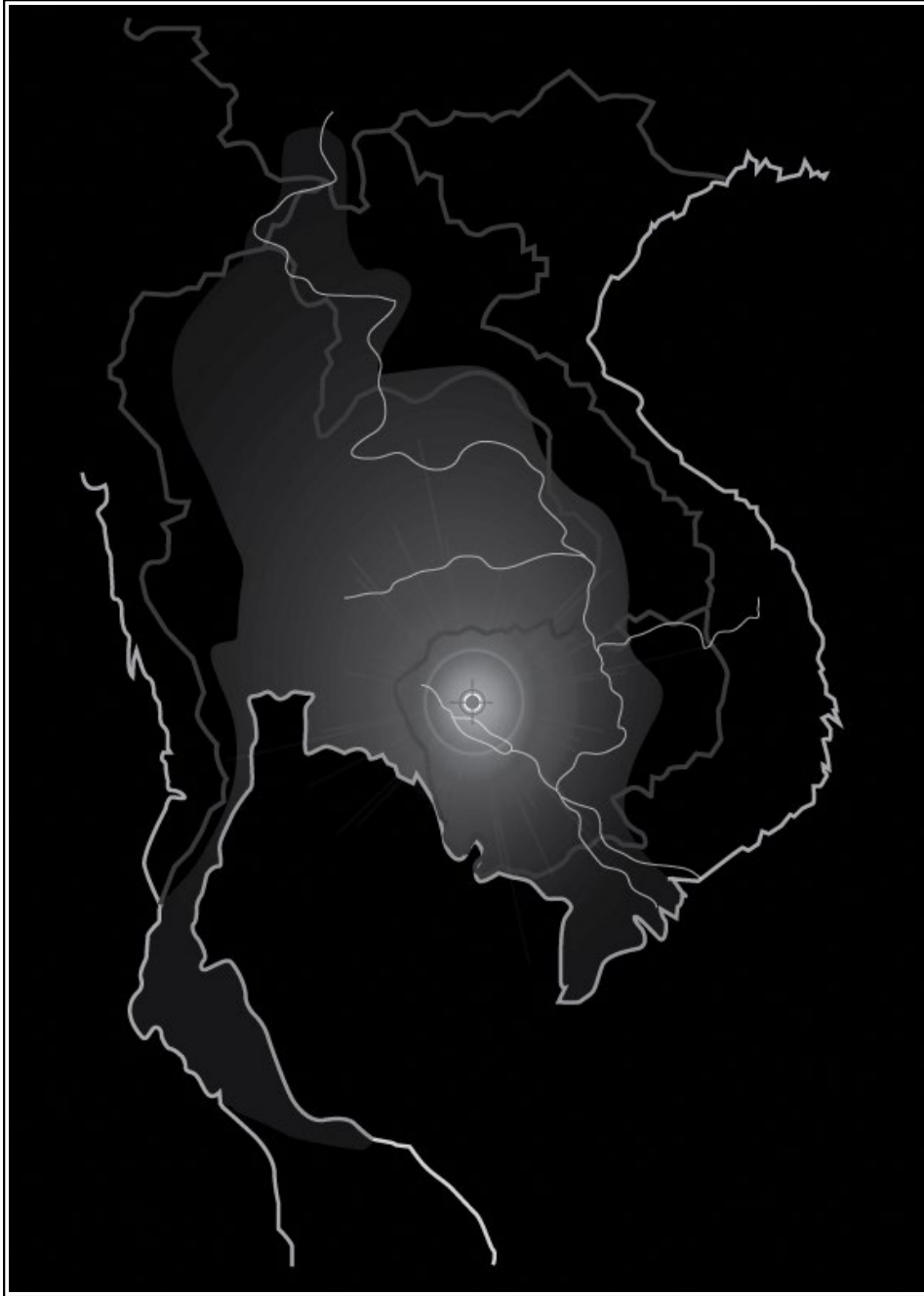
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The Khmer Empire during the Reign of the Royal Triad (1181-1220)

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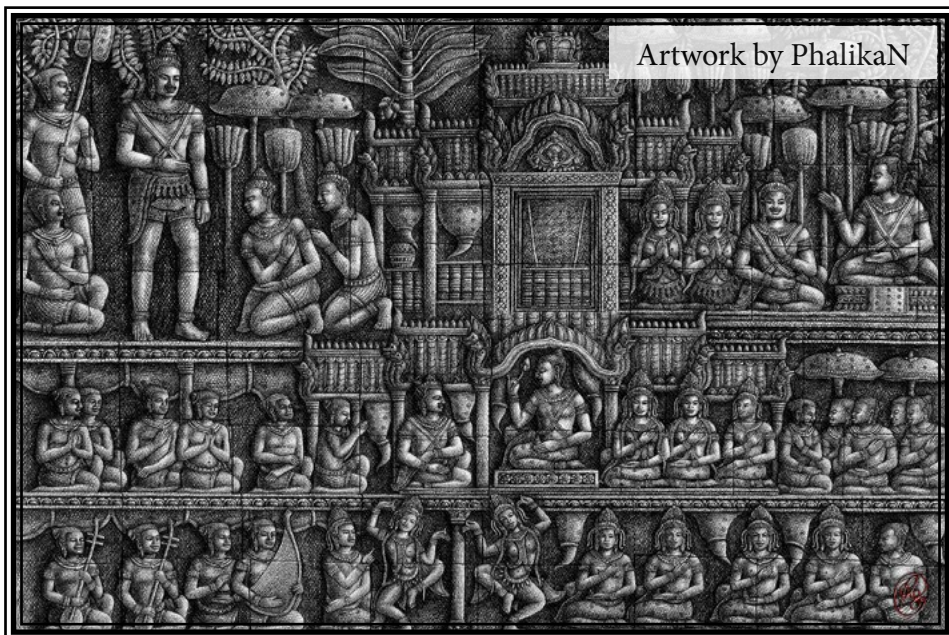
### Reconstructing Ancient Social Engineers

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*Discover the Secrets of the Royal Triad in Angkor*



**An important Bayon bas-relief that has been forgotten and neglected.**



**An original re-creation reveals a royal visit and respect being paid to parents'.**

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## Acknowledgements

The royal triad and I owe our deepest gratitude to Barbara Keely, my benevolent editor and best friend. Without her dedicated, patient and consistent edits to my wild, unruly writings, this civic discovery and the subsequent papers would not exist.

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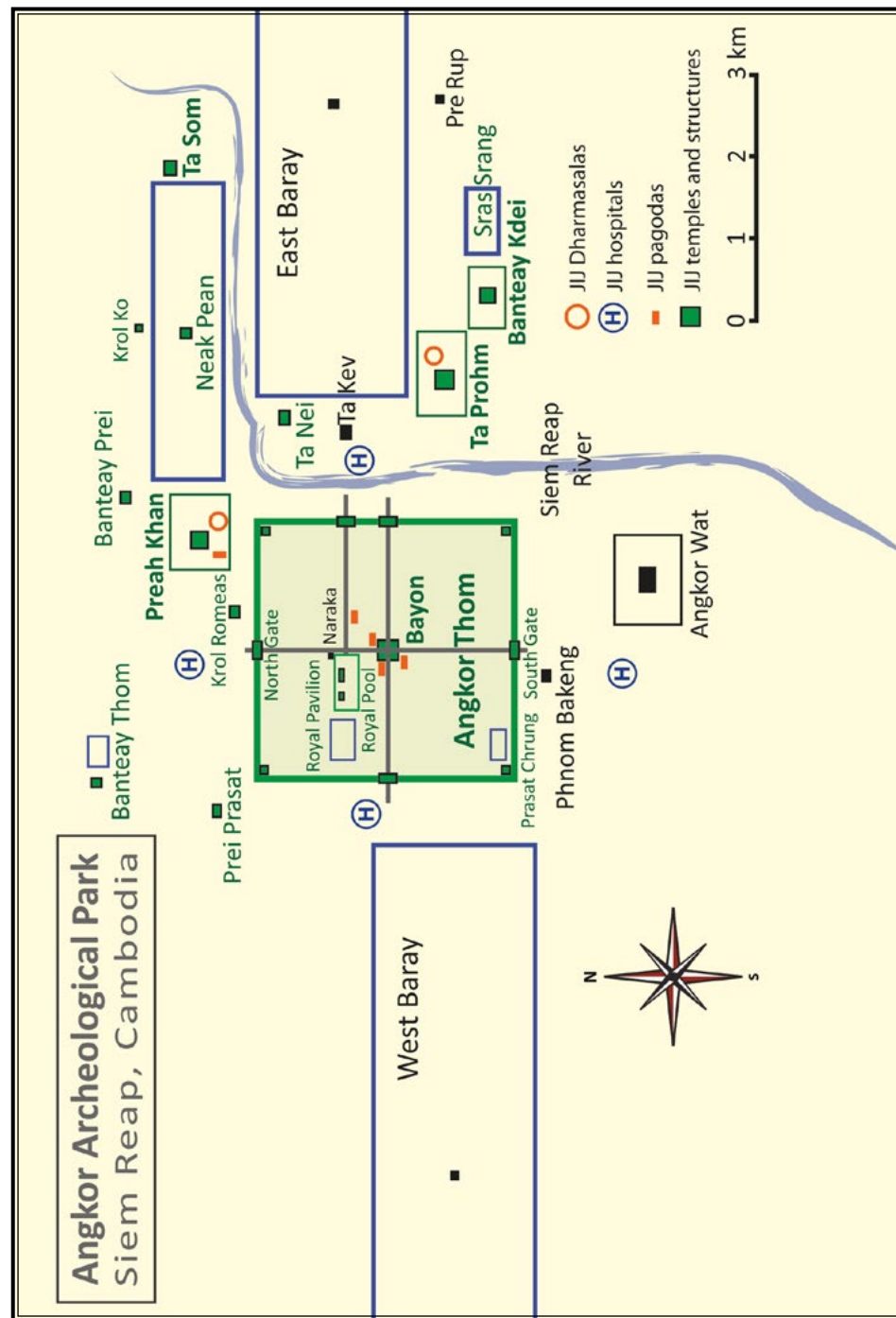
*Discover the Secrets of the Royal Triad in Angkor*



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## Preface

The trails of visible clues and clear proofs in discovering the identities of the three famous royals and solving an ancient crime can easily be revisited and explored by tourists, locals and historians alike in Angkor Park. *I see. You see. They see. We can all see an ancient world that has been documented and expressed using the simple, natural and universal language of images. These carved images were left by the king and two queens as an enduring narrative of Khmer life in the thriving metropolis of Angkor Thom since 1181.* All visitors can now walk, see, touch, feel, and re-live – in the present – a past Khmer civilization that existed eight centuries ago.

Simple questions are left unanswered in history books, such as: What did the queens look like? What were their royal emblems? What was the king's favorite weapon? Who loved them? Who betrayed them? Who were their enemies? Were the queens military leaders? How many children did they have? What were the differences between the two sisters and queens? What were their favorite dresses? Where can you find them? Where did they live? How did they die? What was the kingdom flag? Yet, these and other questions can be answered today, as found on hard stones in the realm of Angkor Thom and the vicinity. The emerging profile of the royal triad may surprise readers with respect to the architectural and social advances they innovated during the Middle Ages, which are still unparalleled today.

Beginning with seemingly minor details, such as the common royal emblems and regal attire, initially helped to define the royals and to identify their personal characteristics. Then, by re-examining prior bas-reliefs featuring the royal figures in several scenes, slowly and surely, an illustrated ancient world reappeared, teeming with information about a past society.

## Preface

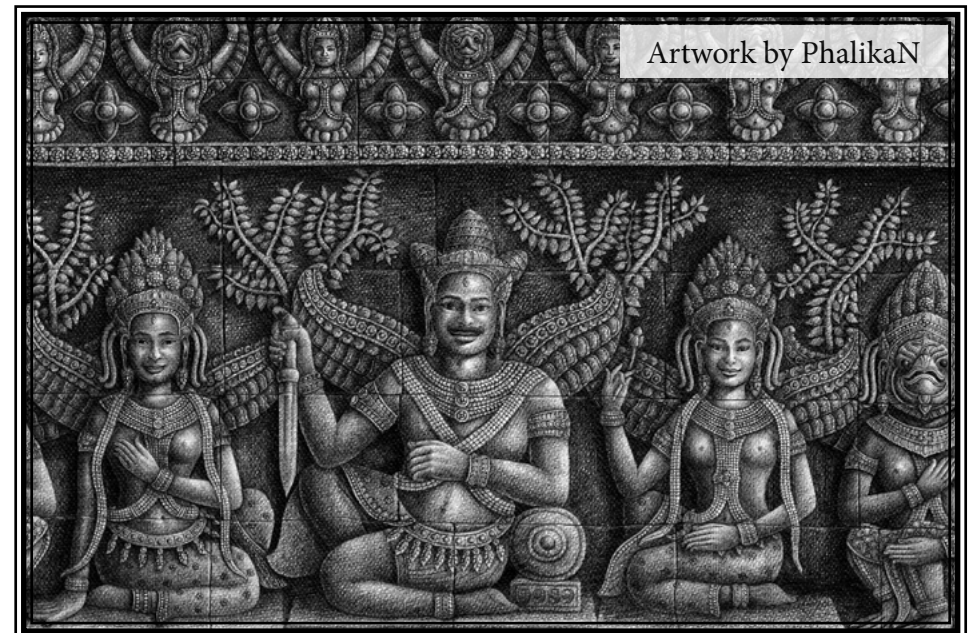
The royal triad left an astonishing gift for humanity of monuments and a wealth of information in simple, clear, visual stories about their reign over the Khmer Empire for all generations – past, present and future – to see, touch and feel. These images have been, since 1181, sculpted onto the bas-reliefs of Angkor Thom and the vicinity and ingeniously integrated into the architecture of this royal triad's numerous temples and structures. No two temples are alike. Each monument reflects the philosophy, social order, politics, innovation, organization and execution of the avant-garde vision of King Jayavarman, Queen Indradevi and Queen Jayarajadevi for transforming a monarchy into a great civilized nation.

*Before your eyes, the mystery enshrouding the royal triad, as well as other enigmas long hidden in plain sight, will be solved.*

And for those of you who will venture into their ancient kingdom, the royal triad will welcome you with heartfelt smiles.

**“Learn from yesterday, live for today, hope for tomorrow.  
The important thing is not to stop questioning.”**

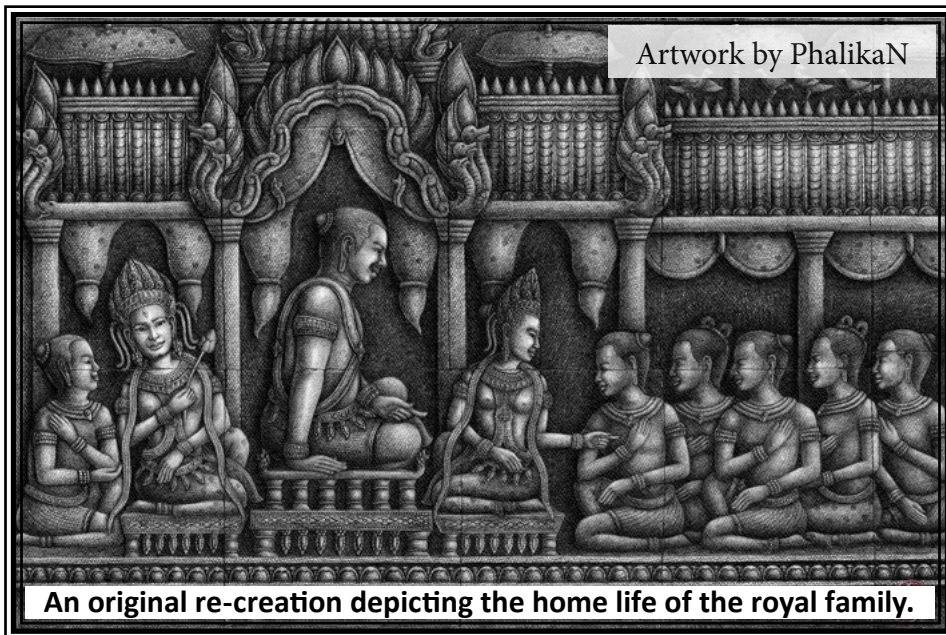
**– Albert Einstein, 1879 - 1955**







*One of Bayon's most important bas-reliefs has been shamelessly neglected and ignored. As a result, millions of visitors have not learned the real and beautiful, but cruel, royal story.*



## Introduction

Oddly, in current world history, images of the three most famous, prolific temple builders and social innovators of the 12th century Khmer Angkorian era are limited to one presumed image of King Jayavarman VII, one uncertain image of Queen Jayarajadevi and no images of Queen Indradevi (see Fig. 1). The mystified profile of the king rests solely on the interpretation of this single image of him meditating. However, during their 38-year reign, these three rulers left a monumental legacy of innumerable iconography of the Mahayana trinity of Buddha, Avalokiteshvara and Prajnaparamita, as well as Buddhist devatas and apsaras – of which most are adorned with partial or full royal regalia (Albanese 80-89). Yet, the found images depicting the two royals, Jayavarman VII and Jayarajadevi, show them wearing sparse clothing that bears no distinguishing hallmarks from that of the indigenous commoners of the era. Such peculiarities could ultimately be revealed through a study of long overlooked royal details. Thus, my initial investigation set out to identify the hallmarks and images of Queen Indradevi, Queen Jayarajadevi and King Jayavarman VII in their royal regalia. The examined iconography and data are accompanied by concise overviews, which further help to define a distinctive style that was clearly carved, cleverly branded and incorporated within the design of the walls and structures of their temples' open architecture. Additional research naturally ensued for which I revisited and re-examined mysterious, overlooked bas-reliefs that reveal and narrate their pioneering lifestyle, politics and (presently unknown) unimaginable, tumultuous ending in unpoetic justice for these three legendary heroes.

Following a simple logic, I began my investigation by conducting a field survey of the temples and structures the royals built. The examination of the existing iconography started in Angkor Archeological Park at Preah Khan, Bayon, Angkor Thom, Ta Prohm, Banteay Kdei, Ta Som, Neak Pean, the Royal Palace, and a few distant sites, including Banteay Chhmar and the National Museum of Cambodia in Phnom-Penh. A sizeable inventory of photographs identifying the locations of the royals was assembled to study details, clues and peculiarities in determining patterns, themes, physical traits, and insignias. This was necessary in order to align the vague legend of the royal figures to the renaissance of the real, influential historical personalities.

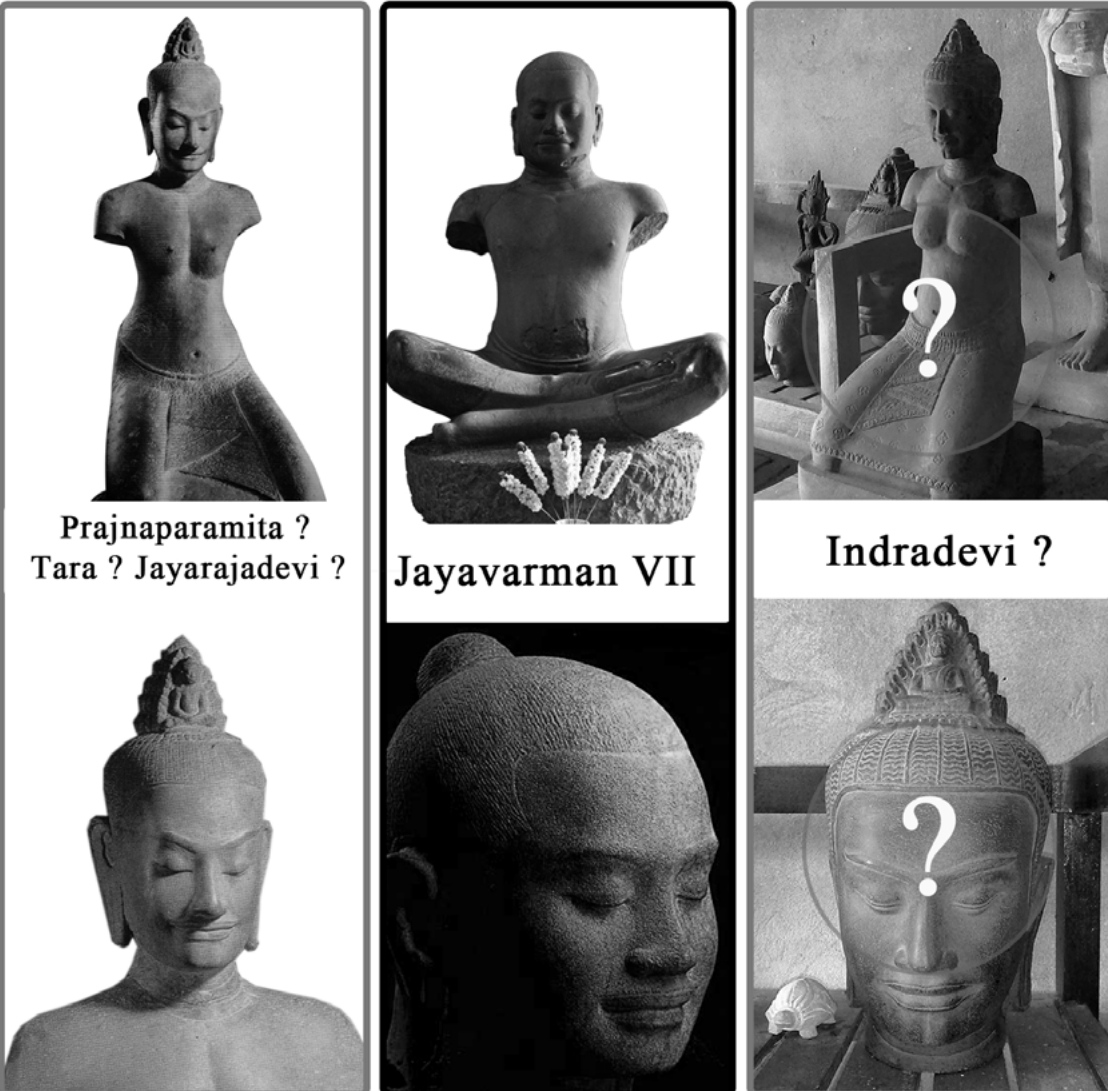


Fig. 1. In the left column: "Presumed" image of Jayarajadevi (Dalsheimer 168). The image is also called the "Kneeling Tara" (a Hindu deity) or "Prajnaparamita" (Giteau 208), a Mahayana Buddhist divinity that the king had foremost deified as his mother (Albanese 252). In the middle column: Jayavarman VII's sculpture is one of four in the current inventory: two in the Phnom-Penh National Museum, one in the Musée de Guimet in France (Dalsheimer 158-161) and one in the Bangkok National Museum. In the right column: Indradevi has no presumed images, but Cambodians sometimes refer to the same "Prajnaparamita" with an added cleft chin as being Indradevi. Prior to this research, these are the only known images of the famous king and two queens.

As a result of my investigative research, old interpretations can now be revised; some unsolved enigmas can be elucidated and new data and insights can augment the knowledge base of Khmer history. Accordingly, the direct results of the rediscovery of the royal triad achieved the following:

1. Clear, visual recognition of Indradevi and Jayarajadevi in their royal attire, hallmarks and their individual facial characteristics (see Fig. 2 through Fig. 4).
2. Simple, visual identification of Jayavarman VII in his royal attire with emblems of power, his physical and facial traits (see Fig. 5 through Fig. 6b).
3. Easier, subsequent identification of the three royals in bas-reliefs and other iconography (see Fig. 7 through Fig. 12).
4. Examination of the empire's governance, as well as the role and influence of the two queens in civil, social and military affairs (see Fig. 14 through Fig. 17).
5. Re-evaluation of the king's connection to the two queens' 400+ images in their temples reveals an enduring, popular royal triad (see Fig. 18 and Fig. 19).
6. New interpretations of lesser and/or unknown sites and structures and clarifying prior assessments (see Fig. 20 through Fig. 23).
7. Review of enigmatic religious iconography reveals the final, tragic fate of the royal triad (see Fig. 24 through Fig. 34).

The fascination with Jayavarman VII's various unique monuments, territorial conquests and the one hailed image of a humble Buddhist conqueror, coupled with the prevailing views of Angkorian women as mere décor in Khmer



architecture (Roveda 75) or “apsaras or devatas destined to pleasure the gods and the lucky ones” (Stierlin 12), has eclipsed interest in the royal lifestyle or in conducting research about the two missing queens in Cambodian history. Hence, the account of both queens is summed up in a few lines beside a questionable image purported to represent both queens. Jayarajadevi presumably died of asceticism, waiting for the king’s return from war campaigns (Roveda 25). Indradevi was said to be “a great person of culture and intelligence” (25), a common reference based on her writings on the stele of Phimeanakas, K.485 (Giteau 208, Chandler 109). Because there was little chance of finding the queens using current references, data in the field was needed to be collected and analyzed to fill the current void.

### 1. Royal hallmarks and physical traits of the two queens

The initial clues, significant in number and detail, were gathered in the Preah Khan temple and then compared to the momentous, broad iconography of the Bayon temple. The results became the basis for identifying the royal regalia and determining specific hallmarks and physical traits of the royals, including specific body postures. The two queens have explicit royal insignia, which is found overwhelmingly in Bayon and other temples (see Fig. 2):

1. The intricate, royal crown has a flame (or lotus bud) shape with many flowerets (crown).
2. The queens are posed in their unique, Buddhist language of body, arm and hand gestures: one up at shoulder level and one hand suggesting a Karana mudra, a gesture of no fears or warding off evil. The other arm elegantly hangs at the side of the body with the other hand suggesting a Varada mudra, the palm of the hand facing forward, symbolizing charity and compassion as in a welcoming gesture (mudras).
3. The presence of body jewelry, gems inlays (only in Preah Khan) and baudriers (torso crossed harnesses), which are only attributed to royal figures or adorned deities (baudriers).
4. The jasmine garlands that contour the body like a long scarf (garland).

5. The long dress fashions end with a fishtail-like flap (fishtail).
6. The pedestals, either plain or intricate in the form of the lotus flower, accompanied by miniaturized, symbolic people and animals combined with a carved alcove – all this attention to detail emphasizes the foremost official and spiritual status of the sculpture (pedestal).

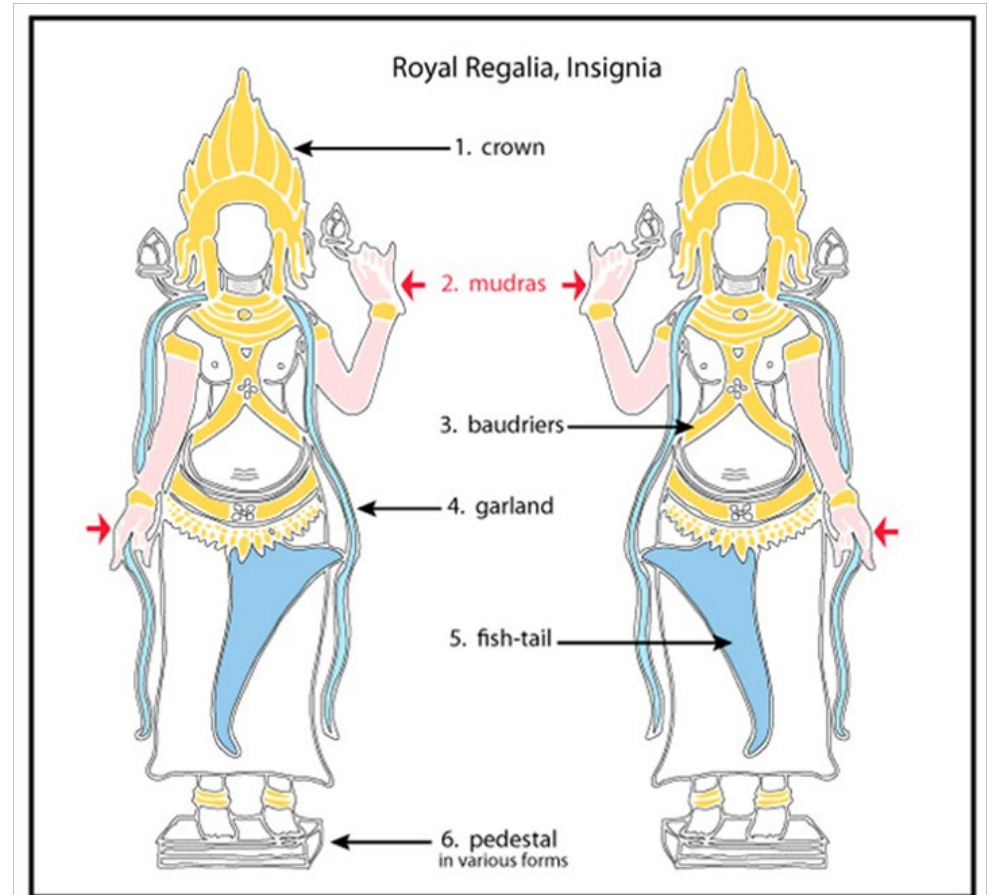


Fig. 2. Royal regalia, insignia and hallmarks of both queens. Consistently, an overwhelming majority of the standing bas-reliefs of the queens are easily found in this pose with the royal regalia.



The royal regalia are specific to the queens. As two different individuals, the sisters had their own unique traits that were recognizable through the talent of the sculptors, even though the images have deteriorated over the past eight centuries. Without the probable royally mandated specifications and close supervision of a master craftsman, the facial traits would vary; however, the accessories in the regalia are straightforwardly duplicated and recognizable even in the sculptures of lesser skilled workers.



Fig. 3. Note the definite features of Queen Indradevi in Preah Khan and Bayon: an oval face, slightly slanted, wide eyes, a long, high nose, a cleft chin, and a gentle smile.



Fig. 4. Note the facial traits of Queen Jayarajadevi in Banteay Kdei, Preah Khan and Bayon: a round face, slanted eyes and eyebrows, a short nose, and a wider smile.

## 2. Royal hallmarks and physical traits of the king

Preah Khan provided the best clue and example of the military crown of the king. The same methods above were used. The king stands next to Queen Indradevi at the lobby of the Hall of Dancers (see Fig. 5). The king wears a signature crown of three cones with the largest cone in the middle and two smaller, lateral cones offset on either side of the large one. The king wearing this triconical style crown is frequently seen in the inner gallery bas-reliefs of Bayon, in a few restored pediments in the National Museum of Phnom-Penh, in Ta Som in the Terrace of the Elephants, in the Royal Pool, in Naraka and in Banteay Chhmar (see Figs. 12, 22, 24, and 32).

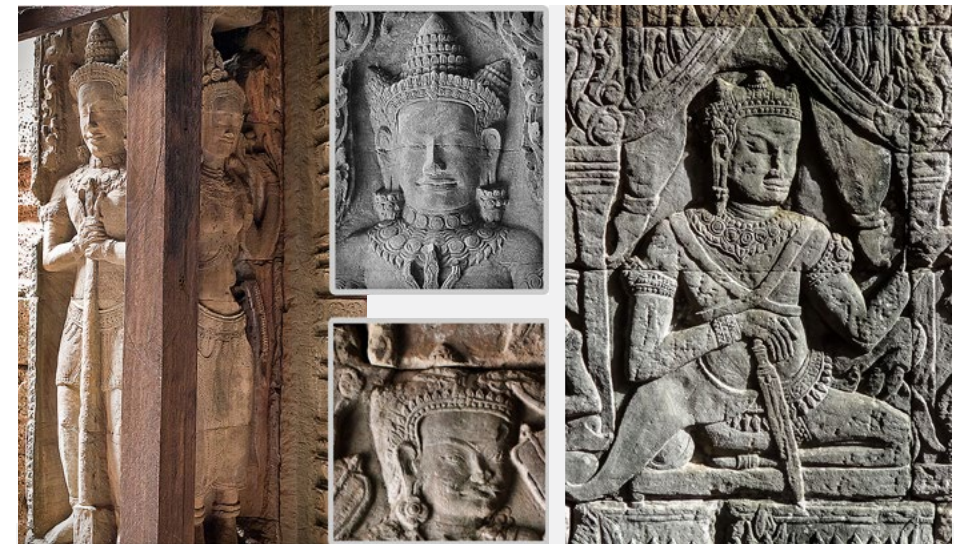


Fig. 5. Left at Preah Khan: The king poses as a Dvarapala (or Deva) next to Queen Indradevi. Middle top, Preah Khan: A close-up of this king's unique, stylish military triconical crown. Middle bottom, Bayon: A close-up of a royal style crown, the king's triconical shape is set lower. Right at Bayon: Jayavarman VII attends an official meeting in a palace setting dressed in full royal regalia (with his favorite weapon, a short sword), including a triconical crown, baudriers (crossed body harnesses), necklaces, forearm wear, bracelets, a fancy belt with pendant leaves, and a winged apron on the right side of the hip.

The current description of the king having a thin mustache (Dalsheimer 161) was true to form when compared to Bayon's original bas-reliefs and its giant heads, as well as on the faces on all the gates of Angkor Thom and at other sites (see Fig. 6a). Also, the known sturdy body build of the king matches the



## Afterword

This rediscovery of the ancient royal triad began with a few simple, curious questions: 1. Why did these so-called apsaras, or devatas or royal dancers, have details uncommon to the apsaras of Angkor Wat? Both have different facial characteristics, and are sculpted standing on lotus accompanied with miniature men and animals. 2. Why did one of the so-called apsaras have encrusted gems on her eyebrows, her crown and along her crossed torso harness? 3. Why were these two most beautiful “apsaras” in Preah Khan left to be abused and defaced by local residents in a dark and filthy chamber threatened by falling rocks? (See Fig. A to D)



*The flag of the royal triad in Bayon, Angkor Thom*



*Fig. A. Jayarajadevi in Preah Khan. More than rain hits the Queen's face. Falling boulders threaten to destroy her most beautiful sculpture with exacting features (see the details on Fig. 35).*



*Fig. B. Indradevi in Preah Khan, 12/20/2009.*



*Fig. C. Indradevi in Preah Khan, 04/05/2012.*

In three short months, I found a clear, strong and logical correlation of traits, characteristics, regalia and styles among the images of these two women found in Bayon, Banteay Kdei, Banteay Chhmar, Preah Khan, and Ta Prohm. Additionally, all these temples were built under the reign of their husband, King Jayavarman. My initial research resulted in the identification of these



*Fig. D. Indradevi in Preah Khan. In the near future, tourists will rush in to admire another pile of ancient, but angkorian rubbles...*

so-called apsaras as the forgotten queens – Indradevi and Jayarajadevi. I published my paper, which detailed my research, in Khmer, French and English on my website ([www.phalikan.com](http://www.phalikan.com)) in March 2010. I've also submitted a paper with my preliminary findings to the local authorities, as well as to international organizations, urging them to collaborate in creating a safer, cleaner and protective environment for these icons of Khmer royalty and culture.

Meanwhile, the two sisters and queens in Preah Khan are still crumbling, subject to constant abuse and deterioration, as they spiral down the path to total destruction. I have continued my research with the objective of calling attention to this historical legacy and the need for its immediate preservation. These two co-ruling queens of the Khmer empire have provided a new understanding of the reign of Jayavarman. The rediscovery of Indradevi and Jayarajadevi has led to the king. Collectively, this royal triad has introduced further insight into their past society and breathed fresh life into my research of the bas-reliefs and architecture of that period.

The process of linking the facts and following a simple logic to decode the mysteries of an ancient, and still important, royal triad was an amazing journey that enabled me to travel backwards in time. My singular commitment to conducting this research has led me to devote four years of my life and virtually all my savings toward it. I have been able to focus on raising awareness surrounding the legacy of the royal triad because of the support of my mother, aunt and uncle. They have witnessed my tireless efforts and strongly believe in the importance of preserving Khmer history, through the care, conservation and restoration of these antiquities, for future generations.

***The most urgent issue is that this world heritage, the cultural legacy of the Khmer empire of 1181, is dying of unabated neglect, which will ultimately reduce revenues generated by tourism and adversely impact the burgeoning national economy. (See Fig. E through G)***





*Fig. E. Bayon, Apr 25, 2010. This bas-relief is located in the East inner gallery. It depicts the hierarchy of the Royal Triad, the builders of Bayon, which was the showcase of the society under their reign. A rare and most important bas-relief that was in good condition among thousands covered with slime, grime and deteriorated over the last eight centuries.*

*Fig. F. On top of next page. In 2011 a no-hand rails staircase was arbitrarily installed for visitors not to see this corner gallery, but to ease the traffic flow.*

Both tourists and locals are uninterested in seeing piles of rocks and indecipherable bas-reliefs deteriorated, discolored and covered with thick moss. As one Khmer local pointedly told me: ***“People can see the same slime, grime and moss in their own backyards.”***

Queen Indradevi, Queen Jayarajadevi and King Jayavarman represent an opportunity for economic growth and wealth for the people of the land, from blue to white collar workers from commoners to ministers.



*Fig. G. In a few more years, reading grime and slime on this wall may well create more interesting stories to tell the tourists, obfuscating all traces of the Triad.*

By means of my work, I hope to raise a high level of awareness regarding the urgent need for the care and preservation of the legacy of the royal triad currently being neglected in Preah Khan, the Royal Pool, the Royal Pavilion, and the gates of Angkor Thom among the world citizenry, local people and foreign organizations. This need is highlighted by the fact that in the National Museum of Phnom-Penh, King Jayavarman's statue misidentifies him as a "door guard."

The royal triad must be recognized and remembered. The wisdom and messages of Queen Jayarajadevi, Queen Indradevi and King Jayavarman are undeniable and eternal. Their purpose was to live, to share and to provide for the people of their era living in Angkor Thom and the vicinity. In the twist of fate they remain present and, continue to make provision for the inhabitants by attracting tourist dollars and grants. The great king and queens are smiling for a reason – it is for us, the people. They are always smiling upon us and welcoming those who venture into their ancient world.

***“Insanity is doing the same thing, over and over again,  
but expecting different results.”***

– Albert Einstein, 1879 - 1955



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*A casual walk in the park led me to finding three lost identities, discovering a famed royal triad and solving an ancient crime. Abundant artifacts and bodies of evidence are located throughout the temples and ruins of Angkor.*

*Thus, with ease, any visitor can revisit, explore and walk the same trails to see visible clues and clear proofs of the royal triad in the temple bas-reliefs of Bayon, Angkor Thom, Preah Khan, Ta Prohm, Banteay Chhmar and others.*

*Experience the lifestyle and shared lessons of the amazing royal triad with your very own eyes.*

*Phalika Ngin  
Discoverer and Author*

