Chapter 1

Introduction
Volume 1: Intra-Asian Transfers and Mainland Southeast Asia

ANDREA ACRI AND PETER SHARROCK

This edited volume is the first of two forming an anthology that programmatically reconsiders the creative contribution of the littoral and insular regions of Maritime Asia—Southeast Asia in the first place—to shaping new paradigms in the Buddhist and Hindu art and architecture of the mediaeval Asian world.[1] Far from being a mere southern conduit for the maritime circulation of Indic religions, in the period from ca. the 7th to the 14th century those regions transformed across mainland and island polities the rituals, icons, and architecture that embodied these religious insights with a dynamism that often eclipsed the established cultural centres in Northern India, Central Asia, and mainland China. This collective body of work brings together new research aiming to recalibrate the importance of these innovations in art and architecture, thereby highlighting the cultural creativity of the monsoon-influenced Southern rim of the Asian landmass. This approach aims at favouring the integration of these findings into the mainstream academic discourse pertaining to various disciplines, such as Art History, Archaeology, Religious Studies and Textual Studies, which too often have ignored the constitutive role played by the (supposedly 'peripheral') maritime regions in the genesis and development of cultural, religious, and artistic motifs across the mediaeval Indic world.

Current research increasingly shows that the Southeast Asian 'peripheries' were freer to innovate than the traditional 'centres', while the flourishing trade routes provided them with the necessary flow of human and material resources. As a result, the early kingdoms of Maritime Asia became wellsprings of cults, ritual technologies, sacred art/architecture, and the new political models they underpinned. A transforming southern stream flowed from India and Sri Lanka, across the emerging island and littoral states, touching East Asia and eventually reaching Northeastern India, Nepal, and Tibet. For instance, images in the Chinese Mogao and Yulin caves, which have been hitherto ascribed to Tibetan influence, can now be seen to be influenced by the art of the Pallava dynasty of Southern India and related to teachings introduced to China by Vajrabuddhi/Vajrabodhi and popularized by his pupil Amoghavajra (Khokhlov, this volume). The early propagation of the new *maṇḍala*- and mantra-based soteriological and ritual systems beyond the subcontinent begins to be recorded in the late 7th century in the journeys of learned and enterprising monks over the so-called (land) 'Silk Routes'. It expands in the 8th century over the maritime routes, from the monasteries and courts of South India and Sri Lanka to the Malay Peninsula, Java, and then China (with disciples following on to Korea and Japan). The presence of such important Mahāyāna and Mantranaya Buddhist teachers as Prajña, Vajrabuddhi/Vajrabodhi, Amoghavajra, Śubhakarasiṃha, Suvarṇadvīpīya Dharmakīrti, and Atiśa in the polities arising along the ocean and shipping lanes turned them into vibrant centres of innovation rather than passive

---

1. Adhering to the same intellectual agenda, this anthology can be considered a 'sequel' to the volume *Esoteric Buddhism in Mediaeval Maritime Asia: Networks of Masters, Texts, Icons*, edited by Acri (2016a). On the conceptualization of 'Maritime Asia' as a geographical and historical theatre for the multi-centric spread of Esoteric Buddhism, see Acri 2016b, 2018, 2019; on the idea of 'Maritime Silk Road', see Kwa 2016. For an argument in favour of the 'Global Middle Ages' (and the still underappreciated role that Asia played in them), see Holmes and Standen 2015 and 2018; cf. Frankopan 2019.

recipients of transmitted Indic ideas, as they have sometimes been considered.

In spite of the scantiness of the textual record of the burgeoning southern trade and rice kingdoms, where manuscript textual sources surviving the warm and humid climate as well as onwards religious and cultural developments[2] are less abundant and relatively younger than those that have come down to us from the Indian subcontinent and Tibet, the scale and artistic originality manifested in the monumental ritual centres in Java, the Malay Peninsula, Campā, and the Khmer domains are striking evidence for the religious and political novelties devised and implemented in the South. The direct access Buddhist and Śaiva masters were afforded to the royal courts of the emerging Southern states—access which went beyond that achieved from the Buddhists' monastic confines in the subcontinent—opened the way to the construction of monuments at large ceremonial centres on an unprecedented scale. Along with the monumental scale came conceptual leaps that turned temples into 'meta-icons', effectively merging the Indic disciplines of *vastuśāstra* (architecture) and *śilpaśāstra* (statuary). For example, early-9th century Borobudur in Central Java, the largest Buddhist monument on earth, is now seen to embed the Yogatantra *garbhadhātumaṇḍala* of deities, as well as the apex of the *vajradhātumaṇḍala*, the two cosmograms that defined a Buddhist metaphysical hierarchy that would spread across Asia from the 8th century (Kandahjaya, Volume Two). A few decades later at Prambanan in Java, some 50km to the southeast, a 47m-high temple to Śiva was erected with approximately 1,000 ribbed, bulbous finials which are regarded as *liṅga*s that carry the monsoon rain down through big *makara*-gargoyles to periodically flood the temple courtyard below with holy water (Sundberg, Volume Two). In the Khmer kingdom, on Mount Kulen near Angkor, a *sahasraliṅga* was carved into the riverbed of the Siem Reap river that flowed down to the capital; three centuries later, the Buddhist Bayon state

temple, carved with multiple giant faces, was '…no longer merely a *devagṛha*, the traditional Indian "house of God", it became itself a God' (Maxwell 2007: 86; cf. Sharrock, this volume).

Southeast Asian kingdoms were not only early adopters of artistic, religious, and cultural elements that have been putatively ascribed to 'India', but also innovators—or, indeed, creators. A specific form of Amoghapāśa, a manifestation of the compassionate Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, important across Asia as a saviour deity, whose cult now became linked to rituals for the dead, is now thought to have first appeared in the Malay Peninsula (Sinclair, this volume). A significant and puzzling fact is that the series of *karaṇa* dance-poses (as theorized in the Sanskrit *Nāṭyaśāstra*) depicted on the reliefs of Candi Śiva in Prambanan is not only one of the most complete, but also the earliest, being about 200 years older than the first known series in the Indian subcontinent, at the Coḷa Bṛhadīśvara temple in Tanjore (Iyer 1996: 170–171); this opens up to the possibility that 'the idea of representing *karaṇa* in a serial order in Cola times was recycled into India after Prambanan was carved' (*ibid.*: 171). Such changes were to reverberate across the Buddhist world for centuries and yet their origin in the southern seas has hitherto gone mostly undetected.

While the *Gaṇḍavyūhasūtra* inspired murals in Central Asian Buddhist cave temples, sculptures and book illustrations in China, as well as scroll paintings in Japan, what Fontein (2021: 1) called its 'most monumental and by far the most elaborate set of illustrations' was created by the sculptors of Borobudur, who were also pioneers in devising a large-scale monumental rendering that finds no counterparts in the coeval Buddhist world. And even if the depiction of the Hindu Epic *Rāmāyaṇa* at Lara Jonggrang in Prambanan might have been an early adoption from Gupta India, it remains unequalled even in the subcontinent for richness and completeness, suggesting that Southeast Asian masterminds inventively perfected and skilfully implemented Indic ideas. This can also be witnessed from the fact that Southeast Asia documents the earliest and most abundant epigraphical evidence of the use of the material zeros in the Indic world (and the entire world indeed)—their rare Indian

---

2.   For instance, the shift from a Hindu-Buddhist to an Islamic paradigm in Sumatra and Java, and from a Śaiva and Sanskritic Buddhist to a Pāli Buddhist paradigm in the Khmer domains in mainland Southeast Asia.

attestations being at least a century later than their late-7th- and 8th-century precursors in Sumatra and Cambodia, and much less abundant than the 9th-century specimens in Java (Diller 1995; Soutif 2008). The problem of architectural prototypes was raised, somewhat preliminarily and provocatively, by Romain (2011) when discussing early temple architecture in Java and India, to 'question the perpetuated use of influence for understanding the process of diffusion of Indian art in Southeast Asia', for 'India related temples in Java appear almost simultaneously with the rise of free-standing stone architecture in South Asia itself' (*ibid.*: 314).

The southern 'periphery' was evidently energetic in sponsoring and devising royal applications of tantric cults of the Buddhist Mantranaya and Vajrayāna as well as of the Atimārga and Mantramārga divisions of Śaivism. Amoghavajra, among others, made contributions to vindicating fierce rituals to support the armies of Buddhist monarchs. The southern innovations followed Vajrabuddhi/Vajrabodhi and Amoghavajra—who outsourced texts and doctrines from South India and Sri Lanka—to China in the 8th century, and Atiśa—who studied in the Malay Peninsula or Sumatra—to Tibet in the 11th century, suggesting that influence in a connected Buddhist world was bi-directional throughout. For a time in the early 11th century, shortly before the Cōḻa invasions devastated several ports in the south and Islamic armies descended from Kabul to plunder Varanasi, Śrīvijaya (with centres in Kedah in the Malay Peninsula and Palembang in Sumatra) emerged as a haven for Buddhist study, with Atiśa sitting for a decade at the feet of Buddhist guru Dharmakīrti of Suvarṇadvīpa.[3] And in the 'late phase' of Buddhism in the Indian subcontinent, kingdoms in various regions of Southeast Asia (like Java, Sumatra, and the Khmer domains) attracted important religious personalities[4] and granted support to artists and artisans hailing from Bengal and the Himalayan region, thereby becoming the last bastions of Sanskritic Buddhism in Maritime Asia.

* * *

This two-volume anthology brings together strands of research by both senior and junior scholars into these southern innovations that are visible in icons and architecture, and that contribute to a new sense of the historical role of Maritime Asia. Most of the proposed chapters stem from papers presented in two summer programmes held in East Java in 2016 (co-organized by the SOAS Southeast Asia Art Academic Programme [SAAAP] and the Nalanda-Sriwijaya Centre of ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute) and in Central Java in 2017 (co-organized by the SOAS SAAAP and Universitas Gadjah Mada).[5] These scholarly gatherings aimed at rediscovering the influence of the Buddhist and Hindu paradigms of mediaeval kingdoms adjoining the maritime trade route. With contributions from leading local and international scholars, the anthology expands on themes of innovation and transfer in the unique monuments, icons, and rituals developed in South India and Sri Lanka, Sumatra, the Malay Peninsula, Java, and the Khmer and Cam domains that strongly impacted Buddhist and Hindu art, architecture, and religious culture in India, Nepal, Tibet, and China, and incite to deeper explorations.

The present volume includes nine studies, subdivided into two parts, combining a mix of art historical, archaeological, and textual data to advance innovative interpretations of monuments and icons across Maritime Asia from a perspective that takes into account circulatory dynamics and the creative role of South Indian and Southeast Asian locales in the development of iconographic and architectural motifs. Collectively, the nine studies presented in this volume explore intra- and inter-regional connections across Maritime Asia and its 'edges' (for instance, Nepal and northern-central China) as well as regional foci, for instance Mainland Southeast

---

3. See Sinclair 2021, Schoterman 2016, and the chapter by Sharrock in this volume.

4. One such intellectual was Śrī Gautamaśrī(bhadra), a *paṇḍita* (native of present-day Bengal) who, probably by the first half of the 13th century, engraved a short Sanskrit inscription on a cliff overlooking the sea at Pasir Panjang in Karimun Besar island (Riau archipelago); the same master was active in Northeastern India and Tibet, and taught disciples who became influential at the Sino-Mongolian Yuan court (see Sinclair 2018 and this volume).

5. Both programmes were generously (co-)funded by the Alphawood Foundation in Chicago.

Asia. They are complemented in Volume Two by nine more studies, two of which mainly dealing with Odisha,[6] and the remainder focusing on Java and its translocal artistic and religious echoes.[7]

Part I, 'Influences from the South', presents three chapters highlighting the transfer of icons, artistic styles, and texts from Southern to Northern Asia, as well as their circulation across Maritime Asia. Chapter 2, 'From Melayu to Thamel and Back: The Transmigration of the Eight-Armed Amoghapāśa', by Iain Sinclair focuses on the enigmatic figure of Amoghapāśa with eight arms, which is prominent in the tantric Buddhist art of both the Malay-Indonesian Archipelago and Nepal. No scriptural source for it having been identified, previous scholars assumed that the figure was among those transmitted to the Archipelago as part of 'Indo-Tibetan' Buddhism. In the first comprehensive, cross-cultural iconographic study of this type, surveying all known examples and drawing on previously unstudied texts that are here edited and translated for the first time, Sinclair lays out a different scenario, namely that the earliest images originated within the former Melayu kingdom, soon diffusing to insular Southeast Asia, East Asia, and eventually Nepal, probably at the hands of Atiśa Dīpaṃkaraśrījñāna, while the latest icons were reintroduced from the subcontinent to East Java in the 13th century, probably by the *paṇḍita* Gautamaśrībhadra. This appears to be a remarkable case of 'periphery' culture migrating over a long period and distance to the 'centre', as well as of the feedback loop popularly known as a 'pizza effect'.[8]

A case of long-distance transfer of iconographical themes from Southern Asia to Central and East Asia is documented in Chapter 3 by the late Yury Khokhlov, 'In the Footsteps of Amoghavajra (705–774): Southern Indian Artistic Mode in Tang China and its Transmission to Tibet'.[9] Khokhlov's research analyses the images from Mogao and Yulin caves, which have been traditionally ascribed to Tibetan influence and believed to represent the early Tibetan style. Contrary to this common opinion, the author shows that these images are in fact influenced by Southern Indian art and in particular by the art of the Pallava kingdom in Tamil Nadu, and closely affiliated with teachings introduced to China by Vajrabuddhi/Vajrabodhi in the first half of the 8th century and specifically propagated in Hexi by Amoghavajra in the mid-8th century. Furthermore, the chapter argues that the Tibetan conquest of the Hexi corridor enabled the still unacknowledged Tibetan appropriation of Chinese religious and artistic trends, which were popular in the region, and casts further light on the Tibetan adoption of Buddhism as a state religion following the model of the Chinese state-protective Buddhism established by Amoghavajra.

Starting from the assumption that we are currently underestimating the influence from the Maritime Asian courts on wider Indic tantric paradigms, Chapter 4, 'Heruka-Maṇḍalas across Maritime Asia' by Peter Sharrock, discusses the royal *abhiṣeka*s or initiations into the system of the fierce Esoteric Buddhist deity Heruka. Whereas the Heruka cults in Northern India and Tibet were confined to secret monastic settings, in the courts of the Southern Seas, political applications of the new ritual technology brought the icons and ceremonies into more public and exoteric modes. The chapter documents the manifestations of this cult in the Khmer empire, Campā, East Java, Sumatra, and China under the Mongols.

Part II, 'Transfers and Innovations in Mainland Southeast Asia', contains six chapters dealing with aspects of Hindu and Buddhist art and architecture in the Khmer domains and Campā, and contextualize them in the religious history of the wider Southern Asian region. Chapter 5, 'Goddess Pra-

jñāpāramitā and Esoteric Buddhism in Jayavarman VII's Angkor', by Jinah Kim explores the religious and political significance of Prajñāpāramitā during Jayavarman VII's reign (c. 1181–? 1218) from a trans-regional comparative perspective that locates Angkor in the trans-regional network of Esoteric Buddhism of the 12th–13th centuries. By contextualizing the use of Prajñāpāramitā in Angkor and the larger historical context, the chapter argues that the analogy of Prajñāpāramitā as the mother of all Buddhas was firmly materialized in Angkor more than anywhere else in the Buddhist world of the same period. By analysing epigraphic, textual, and art historical data not only from the Khmer context but also from India and Java, it demonstrates how Jayavarman VII's political adaptation of the Prajñāpāramitā-mother analogy is reflected in the unique Khmer iconography of the Buddhist goddess Prajñāpāramitā. This further confirms that Khmer examples are not 'outcastes' in the iconographic genealogy of the goddess Prajñāpāramitā, but innovative yet politically sensitive creations that can help us understand the historical process behind the formation of a divine iconography in a doctrinally complex situation.

Chapter 6, 'Dancers, Musicians, Ascetics, and Priests: Performance-based Śaiva Worship and its Development in the Temple Cults of Angkor' by Swati Chemburkar documents and re-examines the Śaiva ritual practices enjoining performance in the mediaeval Khmer domains. Combining data mined from the Śaiva textual archive in Sanskrit and vernacular languages with hitherto neglected art historical material from the Khmer domains, as well as insights from Campā, Java, and South India, the chapter first focuses on the Pāśupata evidence of performance-based worship in the pre-Angkorian period, then documents the survival of this sect as an elite of state-sponsored ritualists through the Angkorian period, and finally describes the development of performance in temples and festivals in both Śaiva and Buddhist milieus in the late Angkorian period. Rather like the Buddhist cult of Prajñāpāramitā, Pāśupata ascetics found fertile ground among the Khmers long after they declined in the subcontinent.

Chapter 7, 'Libraries or Fire Shrines? Reinterpreting the Function of "Annex Buildings" in Khmer Śaiva Temples from the Prism of Early Śaivism', by Shivani Kapoor, Swati Chemburkar, Andrea Acri, and Olivier Cunin, deals with a unique and enigmatic feature of Khmer temple complexes dating from the early Angkorian to the late Angkorian periods, namely the small annex building with ventilation holes built in the southeastern quarter of the main temple, which scholars have tentatively called either a 'library' or a 'fire-house'. The chapter suggests that these annex buildings, which appear to have no clearly identifiable counterparts in South Asian temples, may have been intended to function as both repositories for manuscripts and sacred spaces for specific Śaiva rituals, including ash-related observances of the Pāśupata sect, as well as initiation- and *homa*-rituals.

Chapter 8, 'Śaiva Religious Iconography: Dancing Śiva in Multi-polity Medieval Campā', by Mai Bùi Diệu Linh opens a series of three chapters focusing on Campā. It examines the identity and position of Śiva Naṭarāja, the 'Lord of Dance' manifestation, within the Cam mediaeval religious landscape, particularly in Indrapura, Amaravati, and Vijaya. Having identified seven Cam sculptures of the dancing Śiva in museums and temples in Vietnam, it asks whether Naṭarāja was ever worshiped in a Cam Śaiva temple as the main deity. Sculptures produced in different regions and in various time periods had their own unique styles and these differences suggest a dissemination process through multiple channels over a considerable period of time. The author's analysis defines the independent political stance of each Cam polity as mirrored in its own icons and tackles the issue as to whether they evolved in a unified chronological sequence.

Chapter 9, 'The Colossal Trà Kiệu *Rāmāyaṇa* Pedestal in Campā and its Relationship to Courtly Culture in Cambodia, East Java, and China', by Mya Chau reviews the existing scholarship on the Trà Kiệu pedestal from Campā within the context of the *Rāmāyaṇa* in Khmer and Javanese cultures during the 7th–8th century. Using textual sources and secondary literature, iconographic evidence, and recent excavations, the author suggests that the Trà Kiệu pedestal can be understood as a translocal depiction of the *Rāmāyaṇa* predominantly inspired by an oral narrative tradition aiming at heightening the real and imagined courtly culture for others

beyond the king and his advisors. Visual evidence such as the *Rāmāyaṇa* reliefs from the Đà Nẵng Museum, bas-reliefs from the Chiên Đàn towers, Khương Mỹ temple reliefs, and portable bowls depict imagery related to the Trà Kiệu pedestal that reinforces military and courtly culture, thereby promoting an imagined courtly culture of Campā displaying close relationships with Khmer and East Javanese iconography.

Chapter 10, 'On the Chronological Interrelationship between the Newly Found Inscriptions and the Temple Architecture of Campā: The Hòa Lai and Po Dam Sites', by Trần Kỳ Phương analyses approaches to the Cam temple architectural history advanced in previous research. Through a comparative study of the newly found dated inscriptions at Hòa Lai and Po Dam temple sites, it analyses the process of structural techniques and the decorative patterns of these two temple complexes in order to propose a date for each monument. The site yields indicators of cultural transfers to the major early Khmer sites at Sambor Prei Kuk and Mount Kulen, as well as to Java and to the Malay Peninsula, reflecting a contemporaneous interaction in the region through trading connections by land, sea, and waterways.

References

Acri, Andrea. 2016a. *Esoteric Buddhism in Mediaeval Maritime Asia: Networks of Masters, Texts, Icons*. Singapore: ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute.

_____. 2016b. 'Introduction: Esoteric Buddhist Networks along the Maritime Silk Routes, 7th–13th Centuries CE)', in Andrea Acri (ed.), *Esoteric Buddhism in Mediaeval Maritime Asia: Networks of Masters, Texts, Icons*, pp. 1–25. Singapore: ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute.

_____. 2018. 'Maritime Buddhism', *Oxford Research Encyclopaedia of Religion (Online)*. Oxford University Press. [https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.013.638]

_____. 2019. 'Imagining "Maritime Asia"', in Andrea Acri, Murari K. Jha, Sraman Mukherjee, and Kashshaf Ghani (eds.), *Imagining Asia(s): Networks, Agents, Sites*, pp. 36–59. Singapore: ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute.

Diller, Anthony. 1995. 'Śrīvijaya and the First Zeros', *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 68/1 (268): 53–66.

Fontein, Jan. 2012. *Entering the Dharmadhātu: A Study of the Gandavyūha Reliefs of Borobudur*. Leiden: Brill.

Frankopan, Peter. 2019. 'Why We Need to Think About the Global Middle Ages', *Journal of Medieval Worlds* 1/1: 5–10.

Holmes, Catherine and Naomi Standen. 2015. 'Defining the Global Middle Ages (AHRC Research Network AH/K001914/1, 2013-15)', *Medieval Worlds* 1: 106–117.

_____. 2018. 'Introduction: Towards a Global Middle Ages', *Past & Present* 238, Issue supplement 13: 1–44.

Iyer, Alessandra. 1996. 'Prambanan Revisited: A Fresh Perspective on the Dance Sculptures of Candi Śiwa', *Bulletin de l'École française d'Éxtrême-Orient* 83: 157–184.

Kwa, Chong Guan. 2016. 'The Maritime Silk Road: History of an Idea', *Nalanda-Sriwijaya Centre Working Paper* no. 23.

Maxwell, Thomas S. 2007. 'Religion at the Time of Jayavarman VII', in Joyce Clark (ed.), *Bayon: New Perspectives*, pp. 72–135. Bangkok: River Books.

Romain, Julia. 2011. 'Indian Architecture in the "Sanskrit Cosmopolis": The Temples of the Dieng Plateau', in Pierre-Yves Manguin, A. Mani, and Geoff Wade (eds.), *Early Interactions between South and Southeast Asia: Reflections on Cross-cultural Exchange*, pp. 299–316. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.

Schoterman, Jan A. (Roy Jordaan and Mark E. Long, trans.). 2016. 'Traces of Indonesian Influences in Tibet', in Andrea Acri (ed.), *Esoteric Buddhism in Mediaeval Maritime Asia: Networks of Masters, Texts, Icons*, pp. 113–121. Singapore: ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute.

Sinclair, Iain. 2018. 'New Light on the Karimun Besar Inscription (Prasasti Pasir Panjang) and the Learned Man from Gaur', *NSC Highlights* 11 (December 2018–February 2019): 16–17.

_____. 2021. 'Dharmakīrti of Kedah: His Life, Work and Troubled Times', *Temasek Working Paper* no. 2.

Soutif, Domnique. 2008. 'Dénombrer les biens du dieu: Étude de la numération du vieux khmer (VIe–XIIe siècles *śaka*)', *Journal of Cambodia Research* 10: 51–80.