



SOURCE 1.1 Cambodia

**1-550** First known kingdom in the Lower Mekong River region, Funan, rises and falls  
**500 AD**  
**500** Evidence of trade between the Khmer and Indian peoples  
**550-700** State of Chenla replaces Funan as the dominant kingdom

**600 AD**

**700 AD**

**770-834** Jayavarman II unifies smaller states to create one large empire. The capital is in the Angkor region of Cambodia.

**800 AD**

**802** Jayavarman II enthroned as a devaraja (god-king)

**834-1145** Khmer Empire expands and Angkor Wat is built. Buddhism becomes important

**900 AD**



**1000 AD**

**1177-78** Cham kingdom invades much of Khmer Empire's eastern territory

**1100 AD**

**1181-1219** Jayavarman VII defeats the Chams and expands the empire to furthest extent to incorporate much of present-day Laos, Thailand and Burma

**1200 AD**

**1243-98** Rule of Jayavarman VIII. He renounces Buddhism and orders that Buddhist temples and images be destroyed and Hinduism become the main religion

**1300 AD**

**1300s** Buddhism grows in importance and again becomes the main religion of the Khmer kings

**1400 AD**

**1431** Thai army attacks Angkor

**1432** Khmers abandon Angkor. Over subsequent centuries, the jungle grows around and over Angkor and its location is forgotten

**1440s** Khmer rulers relocate the capital to Phnom Penh

**1500 AD**

**1593** Siamese (Thai) king attacks and defeats Khmer king

**1600 AD**



**1700 AD**

**1700s** Vietnamese armies repeatedly attack Khmer forces in Mekong River delta and defeat the Khmer. The approximate modern borders of Cambodia are determined.

SOURCE 1.2 Timeline of the Khmer Empire

## GEOGRAPHY OF CAMBODIA

Modern-day Cambodia was the heart of the Khmer Empire. At its height, the territory of the Khmer Empire extended into Laos, as far west as Burma and into the Mekong River delta in southern Vietnam. As the empire reduced in size, it eventually formed the country we know today as Cambodia.

Cambodia is located in mainland South-East Asia and is bordered by Laos to the north, Thailand to the west and Vietnam to the east. The Mekong River, which originates in Tibet and flows through Cambodia, is an important source of fish, and water for irrigating rice crops. It is also important for maintaining the ecology of Cambodia. Cambodia has a tropical climate, with the dry season occurring from November to May and the wet season from June to October.

The Mekong River feeds into Tonle Sap, a large lake in the north-west of the country. Tonle Sap is the largest freshwater lake in South-East Asia and has an abundance of fish. It is also remarkable for the fact that between July and October, when the huge volume of rain that fills the Mekong and Bassac rivers causes the flow of water from north to south to reverse, the lake increases in size from approximately 2590 square kilometres to 25 000 square kilometres. Fields and forests surrounding the lake become flooded; the expanded volume of water in the wet season enables fish breeding and the sediment deposited by this flooding helps to enrich the soil surrounding the lake.

Approximately 90 per cent of people living in Cambodia belong to the Khmer ethnic group. There are also Vietnamese, Chinese and Cham ethnic groups. In more remote northern and eastern areas of the country, there are small numbers of hill tribe people. The population of Cambodia today is approximately 14.5 million people. The government is a multi-party democracy, with the capital located in the city of Phnom Penh. The monarchy remains important—the official name of the country is the Kingdom of Cambodia—but has little real power. Most Cambodians practise Buddhism.

Manufacturing of clothing and textiles is an important industry in Cambodia today. Tourism also provides employment and income for many thousands of people. Much of the tourism industry in Cambodia is based on the remains of the Khmer Empire near Angkor Wat.

Agriculture and the water needed to sustain agriculture are very important in modern Cambodia, as they were during the period of the Khmer Empire. Any large empire or kingdom, particularly one which expands over time, needs to have enough food and water for its people, its armies and to trade in order to obtain the goods that it needs.



## EARLY KHMERS

There is evidence of human habitation in Cambodia over thousands of years. The Khmers are one of the earliest known peoples of South-East Asia, living in middle and lower valleys of the Mekong River. They are believed to have descended from migrants moving from the high river valleys of Tibet and southern China, but this has not been proven. Evidence of hunter-gatherer people living in the western region of Cambodia dates back to approximately 11 000 BC. There is plenty of evidence to indicate that much of the region was suitable for human habitation, with abundant water, fish, fruit, and animals such as deer, buffalo and wild boar. Dangers existed too, with tigers and large numbers of elephants in the dense jungle regions that once covered much of the country. There is evidence of human settlements, in the form of the remains of ceramic pots, around 9000 BC in Battambang province. By 3000 BC, large earthworks were being undertaken and rice was being cultivated.

Archaeologists have discovered evidence of the use of iron to make tools dating to about 500 BC. Whether the technology and skills to use iron were developed by the Khmer people themselves or were introduced through contact with other peoples is not known. There are no written records of this period of history.

*This pre-Angkorian period is poorly known from all viewpoints: archaeological, art-historical and historical. Almost no systematic archaeological research has been undertaken on pre-Angkorian sites, the period is not ushered in by distinctive art styles, and few indigenous inscriptions inform directly on political developments during this period.*

**SOURCE 2.1** 'From Funan to Chenla: Collapse and Regeneration in Ancient Cambodia', by Miriam T. Stark, in *After Collapse: The Regeneration of Complex Societies*, by G. M. Schwartz, and J. J. Nicholls (eds), 2006

However, there is also evidence of well-developed trade relations between the Khmer people and India from about 400 BC. From this trade relationship, cultural practices and ideas were learnt and adopted by the Khmer. One of the best examples of the influence of Indian culture on the Khmer is the importance of the Hindu and Buddhist religions during the period of the Khmer Empire.

## LEGEND OF CREATION

Funan and Chenla are the earliest known mainland South-East Asian kingdoms. These kingdoms rose and fell during the first 700 years AD. According to legend, the kingdom of Funan came into being through the romantic meeting of an Indian youth and a Khmer queen. The legend tells that one night some time in the first century AD, a young Indian man named Kaundinya was visited in his dreams by a heavenly spirit. The spirit told him to find a bow, board a ship and travel east in the direction of the land of what is now southern Vietnam. The next morning he visited the temple that he had seen in his dream, where he found a bow and quiver of arrows lying in the courtyard. He took the weapon, boarded a merchant ship and sailed east. His journey took him across the Bay of Bengal, through the Straits of Malacca, around Singapore and up to the coast of Cambodia. There he saw a queen named Willowleaf, the ruler of a tiny country. When Willowleaf saw Kaundinya, she launched her war canoe with the intention of attacking him. He saw her attack coming and shot an arrow through her boat, which impressed her enough to surrender. Willowleaf was naked and Kaundinya, feeling embarrassed, gave her a roll of cloth to wrap herself in. The legend concludes with Willowleaf falling in love with Kaundinya, followed by marriage and the establishment of their joint rule of the Kingdom of Funan. They established their capital at Oc Eo, a location which is now part of southern Vietnam. Ethnically, the people of Funan were a mixture of Khmer, Malay, Indian and various smaller ethnic groups living in mainland South-East Asia.

## MERCHANT-ADVENTURERS

We know that for centuries before the common era, Indian merchant-adventurers sailed to South-East Asia, the Arabian Peninsula and the Horn of Africa, and that there were extensive trade links between many small states and countries in the region and in India. In addition to goods, these merchant-adventurers brought different ideas and beliefs to the peoples of South-East Asia, and these ideas and beliefs shaped the identity of the Khmer Empire. One reason that these Indian merchant-adventurers were able to have so much influence on the early Khmer people was that the monsoon winds blew from west to east and their ships were carried by this wind to South-East Asia. After reaching mainland South-East Asia, they would have to wait for six months for the winds to blow in the opposite direction to allow them to return to India. Thus, they had plenty of time to teach the Khmer about their religion, culture and way of life.



**SOURCE 2.2** Stone statue of the Hindu god Vishnu found at Oc Eo, sixth or seventh century. Held at the Museum of Vietnamese History, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

### DID YOU KNOW

**THAT THE KHMERS USED ANCIENT ROMAN COINS?**

Coins and items made by the Ancient Romans have been found at the Oc Eo archaeological site in An Giang province, southern Vietnam. Oc Eo was one of the two capital cities of the Funan kingdom.

### LEARNING ACTIVITIES

#### remembering & understanding

- #1** There is evidence of hunter-gatherer people living in western Cambodia about 11 000 BC.
  - a** What does 'hunter-gatherer' mean?
  - b** What would be some of the dangers of living this way?
- #2** How did merchants from the Arabian Peninsula and India spread ideas and religion?
- #3** What is some of the evidence that archaeologists have found of prehistoric human settlement in Cambodia?
- #4** Why do we not have a detailed knowledge of the origins and way of life of the Khmer people during this period? Consider Source 2.1 in your answer.

#### applying & analysing

- #5 a** Construct a hypothesis about how coins and other items would have made their way from the Roman Empire to Oc Eo.

#### analysing

- #6** The legend of the meeting of Kaundinya and Willowleaf explains the creation of the Kingdom of Funan. What elements of that story may be based in fact?
- #7** What does Source 2.2 reveal about the religion of the people of Funan?

#### evaluating & creating

- #8** Create an illustrated version of the legend of the creation of Funan. This could be done as a comic book, graphic novel or as one large illustration or painting.

# EARLY KINGDOMS: FUNAN AND CHENLA

Ancient history often presents us with an incomplete picture of how people lived, what was important to them and to their rulers, and why some civilisations thrived while others diminished. One of the reasons for this is the lack of written and pictorial information from ancient times. Another is that, in some ancient societies, a tradition of recording information in writing did not develop. In the case of the early kingdoms of Funan and Chenla, much of what we know about these kingdoms comes from the writings of Chinese traders and diplomats who visited them.

**SOURCE 3.1** Angkor Wat bas relief stone carving depicting a Khmer charioteer in battle pursuing the enemy, Siem Reap, Cambodia

## FUNAN

The legend explaining the origins of Funan in the previous unit does not make mention of the way that Funan grew in size and strength from its capital, Oc Eo. As was common in medieval Europe, the power and growth of a state came through the use of military force or the threat of military force to obtain territory and resources. Between 100 BC and 550 AD, Funan expanded by conquering neighbouring smaller states and making them vassal states. Vassal states were expected to use their resources to serve the needs of the larger state.

The earliest information we have about the expansion of Funan comes from an ambassador who was sent by the King of Wu (a state in southern China) to Funan in the middle of the third century AD (see Source 3.2).

“Once more he (the king of Funan) used troops to attack and subdue the neighbouring kingdoms, which all acknowledged themselves as his vassals. He himself adopted the title of Great King of Funan. Then he ordered the construction of great ships and crossing right over the Chang-hai, attacked more than ten kingdoms, including Chu-tu-k'un, Chiu-chih and Tien-sun ... Then he attacked the kingdom of Chin-lin.

**SOURCE 3.2** Description of how the King of Funan conquered smaller states to the north of Oc Eo and Siamese (Thai) states. From *The Golden Khersonese: Studies in the Historical Geography of the Malay Peninsula before AD 1500*, by Paul Wheatley, 1961

**Q** How did the king of Funan expand his kingdom?

In the early centuries AD, Funan had a large army and the largest navy in South-East Asia. Its ships carried troops across South-East Asia and helped to maintain its power.

## CHENLA

During the sixth century AD, the state of Chenla rose to take the place of Funan as the dominant state in mainland South-East Asia. Chenla, a north-neighbouring territory of Funan, was the home of the Khmer people. Initially, Chenla ruled over many smaller vassal states in the same way that Funan did, but eventually, under King Isanavarman, these states lost their independence and one large kingdom was created. The Hindu religion became the dominant religion. Our main sources of information about Chenla are the writings of Chinese visitors and traders.



**SOURCE 3.3** Detail of carving at the Banteay Srei temple, at Siem Reap, Cambodia, depicting a story from *The Ramayana*

“The [Khmer] men are small and black but many of the women are white. All roll up their hair and wear ear pendants. They are of a live and robust temperament ... They make their ablutions each morning, clean their teeth with little pieces of poplar wood, and do not forget to read or recite their prayers.  
... [Isanapura, the capital city] counts more than 20 000 families ... The kingdom contains more than thirty other cities, each peopled with many thousands of houses, and each ruled by a governor.

**SOURCE 3.4** An unnamed Chinese visitor's observation of life in Chenla, as during the reign of Isanavarman, quoted in *Angkor and the Khmers*, by Malcolm MacDonald, 1987

**Q** What qualities does the author of this source observe in the Khmer people?



Every three days the King goes solemnly to the audience hall and sits on a bed made of five pieces of sandalwood and ornamented with seven kinds of precious stones. Above this bed is a pavilion of magnificent cloth, whose columns are of inlaid wood. The walls are ivory, mixed with flowers of gold. The ensemble of this bed and the pavilion form a sort of little palace ...

The King wears a girdle of ki-pei cotton, dawn-red, which falls to his knees. He covers his head with a bonnet laden with gold and precious stones, with pendants of pearls. On his feet are sandals of leather and sometimes of ivory; in his ears pendants of gold ... Those who appear before the King touch the earth three times with the forehead, at the foot of the steps to the throne. If the King calls them and orders them to show their degrees, then they kneel, holding their hands on their shoulders ... More than a thousand guards dressed with cuirasses and armed with lances are ranged at the foot of the steps to the throne, in the halls of the palace, at the doors of the peristyle ...

### THAT THE KHMER EMPIRE WAS ATTACKED BY PIRATES?

During the eighth century AD, Chenla came under buccaneer attacks from the forces of the Saliendra (‘Kings of the Mountain’), or ancient kings of Java, Indonesia.

DID YOU KNOW

Clearly, the power of the Chenla kings was considerable and the society which they ruled was well organised and concentrated in cities. This is a common feature of kingdoms and empires. Power is often in the hands of one ruler and each ruler relies on a large population of people living in communities to maintain their power and serve their needs.

**SOURCE 3.5** An unnamed Chinese visitor’s observations of King Isanavarman, quoted in *Angkor and the Khmers*, by Malcolm MacDonald, 1987

- #6 Examine Source 3.1. What examples of military weapons and armour can you see in this picture? How would these assist Funan to expand its power?
- #7 Reread Source 3.5 and write a paragraph summarising the symbols of power and wealth of the king. What did people have to do when they met the king?
- #8 Reread Source 3.4. What evidence is there that the people of Chenla were religious?

### evaluating & creating

- #9 Imagine you are the king of a state close to Funan. Your spies inform you that the king of Funan intends to use his navy and army to attack your state. You army is weak and you do not have any naval ships to fight his. Write a letter to the king of Funan requesting him to not attack your state and offering him support and resources.
- #10 Reread Source 3.5 carefully and then on a piece of poster paper draw the scene that is being described. You may wish to work with a partner to complete this activity.



# THE RISE AND DECLINE OF ANGKOR



## GOD-KINGS

During the two centuries of the Chenla kingdom, the kings of Chenla began the practice of building their own personal temples. They were influenced by the Hindu practice, common in India, of local rulers building such temples. Each temple was designed to house the king’s **linga**, a symbol made from stone to show the authority and power of the king.

When King Jayavarman II came to power in 802 AD, he further strengthened the power of the Khmer monarchy. He had himself declared a **devaraja**, or god-king, in a ceremony performed by Hindu high priests. This meant that his authority to rule came from a divine source and that he himself was a god living on the Earth. Chenla was renamed **Kambuja** (the origin of the modern name of Cambodia).

**SOURCE 4.1** The stone linga of a Khmer king, tenth century, from Siem Reap, Cambodia. Held at the National Museum of Asian Art, Guimet. The linga has a square base, an octagonal middle and a round tip.

**Q** Why do you think that the Khmer kings chose to use such a symbol to demonstrate their powers?

## THE SEAT OF POWER

Jayavarman II is recognised as the founder of the Khmer Empire. During his rule, he established a new capital at Mount Kulen in north-west Cambodia. Mount Kulen was regarded as sacred and Jayavarman II ordered the construction of a three-tiered temple on the mountain. Jayavarman II appointed a **high priest** and ordered that only the descendants of the family of his high priest were able to become high priests in the future. While we do not have reliable written records of the actions that Jayavaram II took to expand the Khmer Empire, we do know that, by the time of his death, the empire had expanded considerably. As Jayavarman II’s power grew, he felt increasingly secure and moved his capital city from Mount Kulen to Hariharalaya, near the great inland lake, Tonle Sap. Here he constructed his last royal palace and died in 850.

The group of temples and palaces he built were all located in one area of north-west Cambodia, close to the Tonle Sap. Today, this is the area where the remains of hundreds of temples, palaces, libraries and monuments are found. However, none of those built during the reign of Jayavarman II survive. Jayavarman II’s son, Jayavaram III, succeeded him as king. We know little about him except that he enjoyed hunting elephants and it is believed that he died while doing so. More importantly, we know that he began construction of an irrigation network, designed to help improve rice production. As the empire expanded, the demand for food increased and so it was necessary for the Khmer kings to ensure that food production was also increased. Jayavarman III was succeeded by his cousin, Indravarman, in 877, who further expanded the system of artificial lakes and irrigation canals before his death in 889.

King Yasovarman I succeeded Indravarman. Yasovarman I moved the imperial capital again and created a new city named after himself,

## LEARNING ACTIVITIES

### remembering & understanding

- #1 Draw up a ‘Khmer Empire’ glossary in your notebook and explain the terms below. You will add to your glossary as you work through the activities in this chapter.
  - Chenla
  - Funan
  - independence
  - Oc Eo
  - Saliendra
  - sandalwood
  - vassal state
- #2 How did the kingdoms of Funan and Chenla expand their territory?
- #3 Where was the capital of Chenla located?
- #4 What were the sources of wealth and power of the kings of Chenla and Funan?

### understanding & analysing

- #5 Why is it sometimes difficult to have a detailed picture of life in ancient societies?

Yasodharapura, over an area of sixteen square kilometres close to the previous former capitals and temples. Like those before him, he had a temple built in his honour to house his linga.

Yasovarman I is considered to have been a capable ruler and to have strengthened his empire. However, modesty was not one of his virtues. He encouraged his subjects to worship and praise him.

*[King Yasovarman I is a] ... unique bundle of splendours, whose power was mortal to his enemies ... in all the sciences and all the sports, in the arts, the languages and the writings, in dancing, singing and all the rest, he was as clever as if he had been the first inventor of them ... in seeing him the Creator was astonished, and seemed to say to himself, 'Why did I create a rival for myself in this king?'*

SOURCE 4.2 From *Angkor and the Khmers*, by Malcolm MacDonald, 1987

After his death in 900, five different kings ruled the empire over the next fifty years but only the first two were descendants of Yasovarman I. The position of devaraja became one that men from different branches of the royal family and even from different countries began to compete and fight for. King Jayavarman V came to the throne in 968 and ruled for the next sixty years. During his reign, there were many cultural and educational developments and, for first time, women began to hold important positions in religious and social life. He commenced construction of the Angkor Wat temple, one of the great wonders of the ancient world, in 961.

THAT 'VARMAN' MEANS 'PROTECTOR'

The suffix 'varman' that appears at the end of many of the names of the Khmer kings comes from the Hindi language and means 'protector'.

DID YOU KNOW



SOURCE 4.3 The Angkor Wat temple as seen from the air

## DECLINE OF THE EMPIRE

King Jayavarman VII (1181–1219) expanded the Khmer Empire to its greatest limits. He went to war with the Cham, a Muslim state in what is now central Vietnam, at an early stage in his rule and reduced their territory. At about the same time, a series of wars with the Thais began as they sought to take control of Khmer territory in the west.

### HOW MUCH DOES AN EMPIRE COST?

The expansion of the empire under King Jayavarman VII was very costly. While his armies could defeat the Cham, Thai and Vietnamese, the cost of keeping such armies was great. Soldiers had to be armed, fed, housed and transported, and their families also had to be looked after. Such costs are normally paid for through taxation but historians have found no record of a taxation system during the Khmer Empire.

By the time of King Jayavarman VII's rule, vassal states that were once required to give their resources to the king no longer existed. In addition to the cost of maintaining such a large military force, Jayavarman VII and his successors lived in a very lavish manner and had an enormous number of bodyguards, servants, concubines, wives and children to support. They also used many of the resources that they could have traded, such as stone, timber, marble, gold, gem stones, cloth, food and even slaves, for the construction of grand temples and palaces. By 1200, these costs were too much for the people and the empire to bear, but the Khmer rulers continued to use all of their resources without considering how they could be renewed, traded or built upon. The result was that the empire went broke and its power began to decline.

### THE COST OF WAR

After the death of King Jayavarman VII in 1219, the Cham kingdom in the east and the Thais in the west launched a series of wars against the Khmer. Both succeeded in pushing the boundaries of the Khmer Empire back and these wars placed a further burden on the resources of the empire. Over the next two centuries, the Khmer Empire continued to lose territory to the Cham and the Thais. Buddhism grew in popularity during this period and because Buddhism did not recognise that any ruler had a 'divine right' to rule, it is likely that the authority of the Khmer god-kings would have been questioned.



SOURCE 4.4 The extent of the Khmer Empire in mainland South-East Asia at its height, twelfth century AD. The borders between different states were not as clearly defined as they are today, which is one reason why conflicts between states occurred.

In about 1431, the last Khmer king to use Angkor as the capital abandoned it. In the 1440s, the capital was moved to Phnom Penh. The empire was able to defend itself until 1594, when the Thais defeated the Khmer and Cambodia became a vassal state of the Thais. After the abandonment of Angkor, the Thais looted the temples and took many items, including Buddha images, gold, jewels and slaves back to the Thai capital at Ayuthaya.

## OTHER THEORIES FOR THE DECLINE OF THE EMPIRE

As well as the excesses of the last Khmer kings, historians have suggested that two other factors led to the decline of the Khmer Empire.

- The water management system, which comprised reservoirs and canals and was used for trade, travel, communication and irrigation, broke down. Most importantly, this water management system had sustained the Khmer Empire's ability to produce three rice harvests a year for its large population. This failure of the system led to floods and droughts, which meant that three rice harvests a year were no longer possible. There are two theories about the reasons for this breakdown:

- neglect by the Khmer kings as they pursued their wars
  - environmental problems that arose when the Khmer people began cutting down trees from the Kulen hills to create more rice fields to feed the growing population. The deforestation caused soil erosion and water run-off, which deposited sediment in the canal network, causing silt to build up.
- The Black Death spread from China along the trade routes in the South-East Asian region. Just as in medieval Europe at the time, it caused many deaths in South-East Asia during the fourteenth century.

- b He then relocated his capital to Hariharalaya. What would have been the advantages and disadvantages of this site?
- c Create a Venn diagram to compare and contrast the two sites. Use your answers to a and b above to help you.

- #9 Consider Source 4.4. Name the different states with which the Khmer shared boundaries. Why would having so many states sharing boundaries have made it difficult for the Khmer kings to maintain their empire?

- #10 Why would the lack of a taxation system weaken the Khmer Empire?

- #11 List the reasons why the Khmer Empire fell. Classify these into internal and external reasons. Select one external and one internal reason and write a paragraph on each, explaining why these contributed to the collapse of the empire.

### evaluating & creating

- #12 Reread this unit carefully and complete the following tasks.

- a Create a family tree for the Khmer kings discussed in this unit. Next to each name, write at least one significant fact about the king.
- b In a short paragraph, explain why your family tree cannot be fully completed.
- c Decorate your family tree with either appropriate hand-drawn images or images you have sourced from the internet.

## LEARNING ACTIVITIES

### remembering & understanding

- #1 List and explain the following terms in your 'Khmer Empire' glossary:
  - devaraja
  - linga
  - high priest
  - monarchy.
  - Kambuja
- #2 What new name did King Jayavarman II give to Chenla?
- #3 Where did King Jayavarman II establish his first capital city?
- #4 What were some of the resources that the Khmer kings possessed?
- #5 What were the costs associated with maintaining the Khmer military?

### analysing & evaluating

- #6 Examine Source 4.3. What features of Angkor Wat can you see here which suggest it was built as a religious building?
- #7 Consider Source 4.2. Do you believe that all of his subjects would have believed this praise of Yasovarman I? Why? Or why not?
- #8 a King Jayavarman II's first capital was situated on a mountain. What would have been the advantages and disadvantages of such a location?



The devaraja believed themselves to be god-kings. They also wanted their subjects and enemies to believe this. By claiming this title, they were able to maintain their authority and could explain their success and power as a result of their divine powers. You have seen how the identities of the kingdoms of Funan and Chenla and the Khmer Empire were shaped by spiritual beliefs and religion. What were those religions and why were they important?

## HINDUISM

The most important religion during most of the ancient Khmer period was **Hinduism**. As long ago as 3000 years, Indian gurus, or holy men, wrote and taught about the many gods of Hindu belief. The most important god is the Creator, known as Brahma, who has two incarnations: **Shiva**, the destroyer, and **Vishnu**, the preserver.

Hindus believe in **karma**; that is, that the actions of a person in their present life will affect who or what they become in their next life or **reincarnation**. Basically, a person who performs good deeds and lives a good life following the Hindu teachings will have a better rebirth and a better life in their next reincarnation. Hindu society also has a class system, in which people are classified according to the family they are born into. For those born into a 'royal' family, their position as rulers is seen to be unquestioned. This class system helped to maintain the authority of the Khmer rulers, even when they experienced military defeat, or disasters affected the people they ruled.

## ANIMISM

**Animism**, which was common in Cambodia in ancient times, is different from many other religions because it has no gods or deities. Animism involves the worship of the spirits of departed relatives, the landscape, and plants and animals that are important for food, and a belief in what is revealed in dreams, trances and prophecies. Holy men, known as shamans, are believed to be able to heal the sick, improve crop production and communicate with the dead.

## BUDDHISM

Throughout much of the ancient Khmer period, Buddhism was not tolerated by the devaraja. Buddhism came to the Khmer Empire from India and is named after its founder, Buddha. Buddha was the son of a northern Indian king in the sixth century, and as a young man lived a life of ease and luxury. His name at this time was Siddhartha Gautama. At the age of 30 he abandoned his family and his wealth to become a wandering hermit. After many years, Siddhartha Gautama achieved enlightenment, or a state at which he was able to fully understand the true nature of existence, and thus became the Buddha. At the heart of Buddha's philosophy, which all Buddhists try to adhere to, are four 'noble truths': that suffering is inevitable; ignorance is the basic cause of suffering; any ailment, when understood, can be cured; and there is an eightfold path to the elimination of suffering (holding and practising right views, aspirations, speech, conduct, livelihood effort, mindfulness and meditation).



SOURCE 5.1 Hindu god Shiva, shown here with three faces, c. 1735. Hindu gods are depicted in many different ways.

Like Hinduism, Buddhism spread from India to other countries in Asia. By the third century BC, Buddhism was being practised in Sri Lanka and Burma, and 1200 years later it became the main religion of Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, Tibet and Vietnam.

There are three main types of Buddhism. **Theravada**, or 'lesser vehicle' **Buddhism**, which is practised today in Cambodia, Thailand and Sri Lanka, emphasises that it is very important to closely follow the teachings of Buddhism. **Mahayana**, or 'greater vehicle' **Buddhism**, which is practised today in China, Vietnam and Korea, gives Buddhism a less important role in the way society is organised. **Zen Buddhism**, which is practised mostly in Japan, uses the teachings of Buddha to explain the world.

In the later period of the Khmer Empire, some kings did not see Buddhism as a threat to their rule, so it was tolerated and practised by many. However, its basic beliefs were very different from the traditional and dominant Hindu beliefs. In Buddhism, there is no concept of a god ruling over people, while Hinduism is based entirely on a system of gods who control and shape the destinies of the people, including their rulers.



**SOURCE 5.2** A large Buddha at a Buddhist Temple in Chiang Mai, Thailand

# SOURCE STUDY

UNIT 6

## THE TEMPLES OF THE KHMER

Every year, millions of visitors come to Cambodia to visit the archaeological sites and ruins of the Khmer Empire. They are drawn by the beauty and mystery of these temples and palaces.

Angkor Wat is the most well known of these. It is also the largest religious building in the world. Construction of Angkor Wat commenced in 961 AD and was completed around 1113. It was dedicated to the Hindu god, Vishnu. Much of the work for its construction was done during the rule of king Suryavarman. He developed the capital of Angkor (literally meaning 'capital') and was responsible for the most important of its major buildings and public works. In this unit you will examine three of the largest and most important of the hundreds of temples and buildings in and around Angkor.

### THE BAYON

The Bayon was the last of the great Khmer Empire temples to be constructed. It was built during the reign of King Jayavarman VII (1189–1219). It is dominated by five towers, with each side of each tower being carved with the serene face of King Jayavarman.



**SOURCE 6.2** One of the towers of the Bayon, Angkor



**SOURCE 6.1** Bayon, outer wall: a kitchen scene

### LEARNING ACTIVITIES

#### remembering & understanding

**#1** List and explain the following terms in your 'Khmer Empire' glossary:

- animism
- Hinduism
- karma
- Mahayana Buddhism
- reincarnation
- Shiva
- Theravada Buddhism
- Vishnu
- Zen Buddhism

**#2** How did Hinduism help to enforce the rule of the Khmer kings?

#### understanding & analysing

**#3** Why was Buddhism sometimes seen as a threat to the authority of the king?

**#4** Examine Source 5.1. How does this image show the different aspects of the Hindu god Shiva?

**#5** Examine Source 5.2. Buddhism teaches that it is important to find balance in life and that meditation is one way to help to achieve this. How does this image demonstrate these beliefs?

#### analysing & evaluating

**#6** Use a graphic organiser of your choice to compare and contrast Hinduism, Buddhism and animism. Write a short paragraph summarising your conclusions.

#### creating

**#7** Conduct some further research on either Hinduism or Buddhism and create an AVD to explore and explain your chosen topic.

Sample pages

## BANTEAY SREI

Banteay Srei ('Mansion of Women') was built not by a king but by a Brahmin (high priest) who was related to the royal family. It gets its name from the many images of apsara carved into its walls. Originally from Hindu belief, apsara were beautiful, supernatural women who had the power to bless people with good fortune on Earth and who served the king.

**In a saintly manner, he each day practised, with the same regularity with which he took his meals, the offering of a garland of eight flowers, the oblations over fire and the disciplines of yoga.**

**Each month, in the four phases of the moon, he generously donated to the Hindus gold, garments and cows.**

**King Jayavarman, who lived with him, constantly honoured this sage with parasols of peacock feathers, gold litters and other marks of esteem.**

**He was the first in the knowledge of the doctrines of Patanjali, Kanada, Aksapada, Kapila, Buddha, in those of medicine, music and astronomy.**

**In his fatherland he ordered writers to compose brief tales, he who knew various languages and writings and himself wrote dramas.**

**With medicines, wealth, and science, he wiped out people's suffering: illness, injustice, poverty and error.**

**The poor, the disinherited, the blind, the weak, children, the aged, the ill, and other unfortunate people desirous of crossing the ocean of suffering filled his dwelling every day.**

**SOURCE 6.3** An inscription at Banteay Srei, describing the Brahmin who built it



**SOURCE 6.4** Banteay Srei, Angkor

## ANGKOR WAT

**In the province still bearing the name of Ongcor [Angkor Wat] ... there are ... ruins of such grandeur, remains of structures which must have been raised at such an immense cost of labour, that, at the first view, one is filled with profound admiration, and cannot but ask what has become of this powerful race, so civilised, so enlightened, the authors of these gigantic works? One of these temples—a rival to that of Solomon, and erected by some ancient Michael Angelo—might take an honourable place beside our most beautiful buildings. It is grander than anything left to us by Greece or Rome ...**

**SOURCE 6.5** Description of Angkor Wat by Henri Mouhot, a French naturalist who was one of the first Europeans to discover the ruins of Angkor Wat long after it had been abandoned by the Khmer. From *Travels in Siam, Cambodia and Laos 1858–1860*, by Henri Mouhot, 1864

### SOURCE STUDY QUESTIONS

#### UNDERSTANDING & ANALYSING

- Why do you think the Brahmin built Banteay Srei?
- Examine Source 6.1.
  - What items can you see in this scene that show it is a kitchen?
  - What foods do you think people commonly ate?
- Examine Source 6.2. Does the face of the king appear to be stern and serious or serene and calm?
- Reread Source 6.3.
  - What items did the Brahmin donate to the Hindu gods?
  - What does the Brahmin do to help people?
  - Why do you think he does these two things?
- Examine Source 6.4. What do you think was the purpose of the carved stone figures at the entrance of this building?

#### SOURCE 6.6

A bas relief, which is a carved section of inner wall, of Angkor Wat. This section depicts King Suryavarman being shielded by fifteen parasols, or umbrellas, to protect him from the sun.



#### ANALYSING & EVALUATING

- Examine Source 6.1. Why do you think it was important for the Khmer to show a kitchen scene?
- If the description of the skills of the Brahmin in Source 6.3 is accurate, how do you think he could acquire such skills and experience in a country where there were no schools or universities?
- Reread Source 6.5.
  - How did Henry Mouhot feel when he encountered the ruins of Angkor Wat?
  - Why do you think Henri Mouhot compared Angkor Wat to the work of Michelangelo, and the buildings of Ancient Greece and Ancient Rome?
- Examine Source 6.6.
  - What do you think the king is doing in this scene?
  - What evidence can you see of the king being protected?
  - What evidence can you see of the power and importance of the king?
- Why do you think the Khmer kings and other powerful people build such large and beautiful temples and monuments?
  - From the evidence here, do you think they wanted to make people fear their power? Why or why not?

#### EVALUATING & CREATING

- Imagine that your job is to carve a bas relief like the ones in Sources 6.1 and 6.6. Decide on a scene that you will depict and write a list of what people, things and features you will include in this scene. You might want to use Source 6.3 or other information from this chapter. Draw a sketch of it when you have completed this list.
- In Source 6.5, Henry Mouhot compared Angkor Wat to the work of Michelangelo, and the buildings of Ancient Greece and Ancient Rome. Conduct some further research on the temples of Angkor Wat, the work of Michelangelo and the buildings of ancient Greece and Rome. Create either an electronic slide presentation or an AVD in which you compare and contrast Angkor Wat and at least one of the three other great works mentioned.



## LIFE IN ANGKOR

## FOOD SUPPLY

Many ancient empires relied on the establishment of secure food supplies to ensure that they remained strong. In ancient Rome, imperial soldiers were paid not in money but in salt, which was used to preserve meat—and meat was very important to many people as a source of food.

Rice production was very important in the expansion and maintenance of the Khmer Empire. The Khmer people created what was known as a **hydraulic society** to control the supply of rainwater for their rice crops. They constructed dams, reservoirs and irrigation canals around the Tonle Sap to collect water during the wet season, when there was plenty of rain. During the wet season, rice could grow abundantly in the water collected.

In the dry season, the shortage of water made it much more difficult to grow large quantities of rice, but by releasing the stored water into rice fields, the Khmer were able to increase rice production and support a growing population.

**SOURCE 7.1** Water storage at the entrance to the temple at Angkor Wat

- Q**
- 1 How do we store water today for use in our homes and in farming?
  - 2 Are our methods today similar to or different from the method used by the Khmer people to store water?

## DAILY LIFE

## HEALTH

We know that the Khmer people and their rulers developed ways of treating illness. There are, however, few sources of information about how they did this. One that does survive is the diary of a Chinese diplomat, Chou Ta-Kuan, written over one year from 1296 to 1297, which explains how the Khmer people treated some illnesses.

*The people of Cambodia often cure themselves of many illnesses by plunging into water and washing the head again and again. Nevertheless, the traveller meets many lepers along the way. Even when these unfortunates sleep and eat among their fellow-countrymen, no protest is made. By some it is said that leprosy is the outcome of climatic conditions. Even one of the sovereigns [kings] fell victim to the disease, and so the people do not look on it as a disgrace ... As in our country, drugs can be bought in the market; of these, with their strange names, I have no knowledge. There are also sorcerers who practise their arts on the Cambodians.*

*How utterly absurd!*

**SOURCE 7.2** Chou Ta-Kuan's description of some of the health problems people faced and how they treated them. From *The Customs of Cambodia*, by Chou Ta-Kuan, written between 1297 and 1312 and published by the Siam Society in 1993

**Q** What did Cambodian people do to cure themselves of illnesses?

From other sources, we learn that some Khmer kings developed systems of health care for their people. King Jayavarman VII (ruled 1181–1219), for example, built over 100 hospitals and 101 rest-houses at 16-kilometre intervals along Cambodia's main roads. He also built more than 20 000 temples and religious shrines.

*Filled with a deep sympathy for the good of the world, the king swore this oath: All the beings who are plunged in the ocean of existence, may I draw them out by virtue of this good work. 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.*

**SOURCE 7.3** An inscription on a wall of a hospital built by Jayavarman VII, explaining why he built it. From *A History of Cambodia*, by D. P. Chandler, 1992

**Q** According to this source, why did the king build this hospital?

## SLAVES

Today we consider slavery as inhumane and a serious abuse of human rights. In many societies in the past, slavery was considered normal or even necessary. Men, women and children taken from Africa were forced to work as slaves in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century America, and the road network of the Roman Empire and the temples of the Aztecs were also built by slaves. Similarly, more than 20 000 people were forced to work on the construction of Angkor Wat.

*Wild men from the hills can be bought to serve as slaves. Families of wealth may own more than one hundred; those of lesser means content themselves with ten or twenty; only the very poor have none. These savages are captured in the wild mountainous regions, and are of a wholly separate race called Chuang ... After being brought to town, they dare not venture out of their owners' houses ... If young and strong, slaves may be worth a hundred pieces of cloth; when old and feeble, they can be had for thirty or forty pieces. They are permitted to lie down or be seated only beneath the floor of the house. To perform their tasks they may go upstairs, but only after they have knelt, bowed to the ground, and joined their hands in reverence.*

**SOURCE 7.4** From *The Customs of Cambodia*, by Chou Ta-Kuan, written between 1297 and 1312 and published by the Siam Society in 1993

During the early period of the empire, slaves were taken from vassal states. As the vassal states disappeared and were absorbed into Cambodia, the supply of slaves stopped. Towards the end of the Angkor period, slaves could only be obtained in the way described in Source 7.4 In addition to slaves, there were an estimated 5000 girls who lived in the palace as servants of the king.



SOURCE 7.5 A carved Khmer apsara

## FESTIVALS

The Khmer participated in many festivals and games. Every four months a festival would be held and in the final month of the year, people would play competitive ball games. At these festivals, high-ranking men and women would arrive on the backs of elephants or in horse-drawn chariots. They witnessed fireworks displays, dancing, wild-boar fights and royal reviews. There were many pavilions decorated with lanterns and flowers throughout the capital. Every year in September, a census would be held. The entire population of the kingdom had to come to the capital to be reviewed before the royal palace and counted.

## THE KING

You have learnt from many sources in this chapter that the Khmer kings were powerful and that they lived lives in which they paid much attention to religious practices and to their own comfort and security. Chou Ta-Kuan also recorded in his diary how the king appeared to the people and the enormous wealth that the king possessed (see Source 7.6).

*When the king leaves his palace, the procession is headed by the soldiery; then come the flags, the banners, the music. Girls of the palace, three or five hundred in number, gaily dressed, with flowers in their hair and tapers in their hands, are massed together in a separate column ... Then came other girls carrying gold and silver vessels from the palace and a whole galaxy of ornaments, of very special design, the uses of which were strange to me. Then came ... the bodyguard of the palace ... Following them came chariots drawn by goats and horses, all adorned with gold, ministers and princes, mounted on elephants, were preceded by bearers of scarlet parasols, without number. Close behind came the royal wives and concubines [unofficial wives], in palanquins and chariots, or mounted on horses or elephants, to whom were assigned at least a hundred parasols mottled with gold. Finally the Sovereign appeared, standing erect on an*

*elephant and holding in his hand the sacred sword. This elephant, his tusks sheathed in gold, was accompanied by bearers of twenty white parasols with golden shafts. All around was a bodyguard of elephants, drawn close together, and still more soldiers for complete protection, marching in close order.*

SOURCE 7.6 From *The Customs of Cambodia*, by Chou Ta-Kuan, written between 1297 and 1312 and published by the Siam Society in 1993



SOURCE 7.7 The view from the rear courtyard of Angkor Wat to the main tower, where the king slept every night with the queen. His other four main wives slept in the four outer towers of Angkor Wat.

**DID YOU KNOW**

**THAT THE KHMER DID NOT USE HUMAN FAECES TO FERTILISE THEIR CROPS?**

Chou Ta-Kuan was surprised that the Khmer did not use human faeces to fertilise their crops. This was a common practice in China at the time.

## LEARNING ACTIVITIES

### remembering & understanding

- #1 List and explain the following terms in your 'Khmer Empire' glossary:
  - apsara
  - census
  - Chuang
  - hydraulic society.
- #2 Why was storage of rainwater important? In what way did it support the Khmer economy and society?
- #3 Reread Source 7.3. What does the king wish for?
- #4 Reread Source 7.4. Do you think the slaves lived in fear? What evidence can you find in this source to determine this?

### understanding & analysing

- #5 a Why did many empires and kingdoms use slaves to serve their people and build large monuments?  
b Why is slavery rarely practised today?
- #6 Examine Source 7.5. Look at the expression on the face of the apsara. What emotion can you see? Why do you think apsara were depicted in this way?
- #7 How did the king show his power and wealth?
- #8 Examine Source 7.7. Why do you think that the king slept in the highest tower of Angkor Wat?

### evaluating & creating

- #9 As a class, use the evidence in this unit and in this chapter to debate the following: *The Khmer kings were cruel and ruthless rulers.*
- #10 Examine Source 7.6. Draw and colour a picture of the scene described.

**DID YOU KNOW**

**THAT THE WALLS OF ANGKOR WAT ARE COVERED WITH CARVINGS OF GRACEFUL WOMEN DANCERS?**

Inside Angkor Wat, on the walls there is a gallery of over 1700 carved bas-relief statues of apsara, or dancers. Historians are not certain about their true purpose. Were they images of the kings' wives immortalised in stone or merely beautiful decoration?