

All Royal Roads Lead to Angkor

Author : Yoshiaki Ishizawa
Photographs by Hitoshi Tamura
(Weatherhill, Tokyo and New York, 1999)

All *Royal Roads Lead to Angkor*, published in 1999, combines the expertise of Yoshiaki Ishizawa, a renowned scholar on Cambodia, and the talent and skill of Hitoshi Tamura, a sensitive and experienced photographer, to produce an informative text with outstanding colour photographs of the highest quality. These photographs comprise the first two-thirds of the book, follow by the text and an 'Afterword'. The 'royal roads' - of the book title - were built during the Angkor Period (ninth to mid-fifteenth century) and extend in various directions from Angkor (northwestern Cambodia), the political and administrative centre, to outlying provinces of the Khmer Empire.

In the twelfth century, the territorial boundaries of the Khmer Empire encompassed an area that stretched 'from southern Laos to the Gulf of Siam, and from the border with Pagan in the west (modern Myanmar) to Champa in the east.' A well-drawn map of the royal roads with major Angkorean temples accurately placed is included. There are descriptions of major temples, built by the Khmers, that are situated either along or in proximity to the 'royal roads'.

The text begins with a description of Khmer Society and information on the origins of civilisation in Cambodia, geography, linguistics, religious beliefs and the early states of Funan and Chenla, so-named in Chinese chronicles. The next section traces the history of the Angkor Period chronologically through the reigns of important kings, starting with Jayavarman II who united the existing states at the beginning

of the ninth century to form the Khmer Empire. The territorial expansion under the reign of Indravarman later in the same century, and the first royal capital to be built in the Angkor area by Yasovarman are highlighted. Four further kings and their accomplishments are identified.

'The peak of Angkor' opens with the twelfth-century reign of Suryavarman II, the builder of the great temple of Angkor Wat, and the ruler who took the boundaries of the Khmer Empire to previously unknown limits. The achievements of Jayavarman VII, who reigned in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, and built the Royal City of Angkor Thom, are also explored; he was the last great king of Angkor, and no further significant temples were built after his reign.

The 'Decline of Angkor' starts with the death of Jayavarman VII in approximately a.d. 1220. Afterwards, the territorial boundaries of the kingdom shrunk and the neighbouring Thais (Siamese) became a threat to the Khmers. A subsequent king initiated a brief revival of Hinduism before Theravada Buddhism, the religion that is dominant in the country today, was introduced at the beginning of the fourteenth century.

Ishizawa's views on the controversial topic of 'Water Control in Angkor' are set out in the next section. The question of whether or not the Khmers irrigated the rice fields on the Angkor plain through a sophisticated hydraulic water control system or by simple flood retreat rice cultivation has been the subject of intensive

debate amongst scholars in recent years. Ishizawa argues that the Khmers installed and maintained an irrigation system sufficient to produce multiple rice crops annually. He believes that the water in the large reservoirs, still evident today, at Angkor, was stored for usage during the dry season; and was used for 'supplementary irrigation' in the rice fields. He presents new evidence, based on a topographical survey conducted by the Japan International Cooperation Agency in 1998, that shows a series of earthen dikes paralleling the walls of the reservoirs that could be used for releasing water into the fields. This evidence contradicts that derived from aerial photographs, which do not show a vast network of canals feeding from the reservoirs to the rice fields. Ishizawa believes that maintenance of the irrigation system declined after the introduction of Theravada Buddhism in the thirteenth century when the Khmers' central belief system and spiritual values declined.

The next section describes daily life in the Khmer Empire, drawing on information provided by Zhou Daguan, a Chinese emissary who lived at Angkor for nearly one year between a.d. 1296 and 1297, and wrote a detailed account of his observations. It is the only first-hand record of daily life at Angkor. Zhou wrote about the markets at Angkor, the clothes and jewelry worn by Khmer men and women, and their houses. As a foreign dignitary, he was allowed inside the Royal City of Angkor Thom and in the environs of the palace, which he described in detail.

'Cambodia After the Fall of Angkor' is an interesting account mainly about Japanese visitors to Angkor Wat in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Over fourteen Japanese inscriptions are known at the temple. One visitor drew a detailed and accurately oriented plan of Angkor Wat, but misnamed it 'Map of Jetavana.'

Descriptions of the layout and the orientation of outlying temples such as Banteay Chhmar,

northwest of Angkor, near the border between Cambodia and Thailand, and Preah Vihear on a cliff of the Dangrek Mountains, are made available to the general public for the first time. The twelfth-century Khmer-style temples at Lopburi, or Lavo, in central Thailand, are identified; as are those built at Sukhothai, the Thai kingdom that flourished between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries. Ishizawa points out that Khmer influence can even be seen in temples such as Wat Mahathat at Ayutthaya, the capital in southern Thailand that superceded Sukhothai.

'The Royal Road to the East' provides details of two important, yet rarely seen, temples: Beng Mealea and Preah Khan, both east of Angkor. These two monuments have been, and still are, inaccessible to the general tourist. Beng Mealea is a vast temple complex of the twelfth century, only slightly smaller than the great temple of Angkor Wat. Ishizawa first surveyed Beng Mealea in 1961 and again in 1997, and is one of the few foreigners who have visited the site.

The final sites described in the text are Wat Phu in southern Laos, and the Kingdom of Champa (second to seventeenth century) in central and southern Vietnam, both situated on royal roads from Angkor. The area of Wat Phu was an ancient seat of power of an early Khmer state known in Chinese chronicles as Chenla, and dates to the fifth century.

The title of the book was inspired by the novel, *La Voie Royale* [The Royal Way or Road] written by Andre Malraux, and published in 1930. The last section of Ishizawa's text, which is entitled 'A Meeting of Fiction and Nonfiction: Andre Malraux's *La Voie Royale*', recounts the plot of this novel written by Malraux which was set at Angkor. The story centres on the remote temple of Banteay Srei, northeast of Angkor, where architectural artifacts were removed by a man, his wife, a close friend and a guide, and shipped to Phnom Penh. The suspects were held by government officials, and finally sentenced to a suspended sentence of one year's imprisonment, and the return of the stolen art.

The main character of the story is none other than Malraux himself.

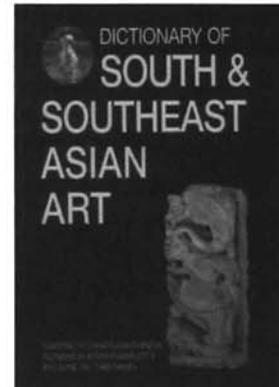
'Photographer's Afterword: Angkor's Long Silence and a New Dawn,' by Hitoshi Tamura, a veteran photo-journalist who specialises in the history and culture of East and Southeast Asia, is a personal account of his first glimpse of the towers of Angkor Wat in 1973, and his desire to return to photograph the Khmer

temples. Tamura writes that his aim as photographer for this book was to 'put Angkor Wat and the temples in its immediate vicinity, which have been the subject of many books, into its larger context, showing the many other temples, capital cities, sacred places, and other sites that appear in the histories of the Angkor kingdom'. This reviewer believes that he succeeded in achieving his aim.

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