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Jayavarmin VII: Achieving Kingship



Ross Seeman, McKay Whitacre, David Oppenheim - Pepperdine Seaver College

Pictures

Abstract

Jayavarmin VII (r. 1181-1218) exemplifies the nature of achieving divine kingship through his life achievements modeled after the life of Buddha. He was viewed by many as a divine-like figure, through his acts of philanthropy and good deeds for the city. Through this philosophy, Jayavarmin VII facilitated the construction of hospitals, several roads and rest houses. The height of Jayavarmin's reign was during the construction of the Bayon Temple. By this time, Jayavarmin VII believed he had completed his journey to kingship. This is shown through the massive faces carved in the temple representing either Jayavarmin or Buddha himself. From our research, not many scholars have connected the aspirations of Jayavarmin VII to the artifacts he left behind. Our group will study how Jayavarmin VII achieved kingship by analyzing three artifacts, including a hospital, the Bayon temple itself and an idol of Buddha, each pertaining to his conquest for kingship and also by looking at other artifacts that are relevant to kingship in other Angkor Temples.

Introduction

The goal of many rulers during the ancient times in Asia was to achieve kingship by acquiring a high and honorable status. The artworks that we have chosen clearly demonstrate and symbolize Jayavarmin VII's journey in achieving divine kingship. The first artifact we have chosen is one of 102 hospitals that Jayavarmin VII constructed. This hospital was built during his mission of creating a better environment for his city. The second artifacts we chose are the bold stone faces that line the outside of the Bayon Temple. These faces that are said to be either Jayavarmin VII's or Buddha's cover the temple, looking in all directions. The idea is that the city will always be under the watchful eye of the leader. Finally, we chose a bronze idol of the crowned Buddha in a pose of meditation while sitting atop a serpent. This artifact correlates to the Bayon Temple due to the distinct similarities in the face of the idol and the faces lining the temple. Also the serpent or "naga" Buddha is sitting on has many interpretations, some being, rebirth, death or mortality in Buddhist culture. This may represent the rebirth of a new Buddha. These various artworks all have direct correlation to Buddha, Jayavarmin VII, the Bayon Temple and Cambodia. Together, they will allow us to pinpoint different segments of Jayavarmin VII's life and connect his journey in achieving divine kingship.

Methods

Although several artifacts regarding Jayavarmin VII's life and the Bayon temple have been written about and analyzed, none of the research we have found has connected the research in a path tracing what Jayavarmin's mission was in life. Our artifacts will demonstrate the different parts of Jayavarmin's life and their significance to him achieving kingship. We will study how the artwork during the time showed correlation between Jayavarmin's life, his mission and the aspirations of the city. This is an area that has had little research. The hospital that we are researching is merely known of by researchers; this architecture displays Jayavarmin's goals in creating a better life for his people. The multiple stone faces on the temple represent the latter part of Jayavarmin's life when he felt he had reached divine kingship. It is still unknown if these faces are representative of Jayavarmin VII, Buddha or a mixture of the two. In fact, some of the books we have read state that the faces represent Jayavarmin, while other books we have read say they are Buddha's face. Finally, after looking at the idol of Buddha, we have found direct connections can be made between the temple and Jayavarmin's mission. Through our artworks we will be able to visually take the audience through the journey of Jayavarmin's life, from the time he began his reign to the time he achieved divine kingship.

Ta Prohm Hospital, Jayavarmin VII, 12th century, Cambodia



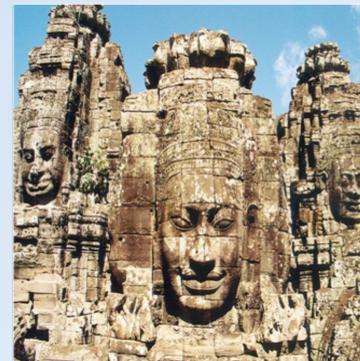
Bayon Temple, Jayavarmin VII, 12th Century, Cambodia



Buddha Seated in Meditation, Jayavarmin VII, Classic Period, Angkor Wat



Bayon Temple Faces, Jayavarmin VII, 12th Century, Bayon Temple



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Conclusion and Discussions

From our findings, we have traced the history and impact that Jayavarmin VII had on the Angkor Empire and the lives of the civilians at the time. Jayavarmin VII, like many other monarchs, desired divine kingship. However, he had a different approach to accomplish kingship and to build a thriving empire. Several artifacts and works of architecture demonstrate the correlation between Buddha and Jayavarmin VII, including the Ta Prohm Hospital, the Bayon Temple, and several artifacts that were found within the walls of the Angkor Empire. Further research could be done on Jayavarmin's life before his reign and what brought him to Mahayana Buddhism. Evidence shows that Jayavarmin VII travelled to Champa, where he became connected to Buddha. We would like to further study this area and the causes for Jayavarmin to be the first king of his kind.

Acknowledgements

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Exhibition List

Bayon Temple, early 12th century, Stone, Cambodia

Buddha on Naga, 13th century, Bayon

Buddha Seated in Meditation, Classic Period (possibly 12th century), Gilt Bronze Statue, Cambodia

Cambodia, Bayon Temple Face, early 12th century, stone, Bayon Temple

Cambodia, Bayon Temple, early 12th century, stone, Bayon Temple

Faces at Bayon, early 12th century, Stone, Cambodia

Jayavarmin VII statue, early 13th century, stone, National Museum of Phnom-Penh

Kamakura Big Buddha, 1252 AD, Kotokuin Temple

Ta Prohm Kel, Ta Prohm Kel Temple from Tourtocambodia, Photograph 666x404 pixels, Ta Prohm Kel Hospital

Ta Prohm Temple, end of 12th century, stone, Cambodia

Stone Buddha Face, 6th century, Stone, China. Photograph by John Taylor.