

FROM THE EDITORS

Udaya was founded in 2000 in a very different context than that in which it appears today. For one, it was a print journal, in a time when we could not even imagine the possibility of disseminating academic research on the then still novel internet to an international community let alone to Cambodian nationals living in Cambodia. Times have changed, Cambodia has changed and *Udaya* is changing. The journal is now exclusively online. Current issues and back issues are free to all with simple registration on this site.

We remain nonetheless stubbornly committed to the ideals underlying the foundation of *Udaya*, and see the move to online publishing through the Open Journal System as a means of further pursuing their realization. We aim, still, to provide a forum for promoting multilingual interdisciplinary exchange on Cambodian culture in its broadest sense. While benefiting from a certain aterritorial nature and power of the internet, the journal remains rooted in Cambodia both in practical and conceptual terms. It is housed by a nascent local cultural institution, Yosothor. Yosothor is an independent non-governmental institution, which maintains close ties with national cultural and higher education institutions. The *Udaya* website, and each issue, is designed and maintained locally. The editorial mission is guided by an increased perception of the necessity to explore and support local perspectives within the context of globalized and globalizing discourse, research and publishing structures. The renewed commitment we make to *Udaya* and to the journal's rootedness in Cambodia whilst we go online belies our belief in cultural specificity, and in the potential of attentiveness to the most local expression to talk back to today's hegemonic power structures, be they otherwise local(ized), national or international. If *Udaya* affirms that the site of knowledge production counts, it is with the knowledge that within our pages we count multiple sites, none of which exist in isolation.

This first online issue includes a range of highly specialized art historical, historical and archeological work. The contributions share methodological concerns for meticulous close reading – of texts, bas-reliefs or data literally in the ground. Together, they highlight Angkor as an historical site and period, as well as a privileged matrix of politico-cultural invention and conservation. In her contribution, art historian Vasudha Narayanan produces an impressive collection of iconographic, literary and ethnographic evidence from Southern India and Cambodia to identify the monkey who

frequently appears in Angkorian representations of the epic Brahmanic Churning of the Ocean scene. The implications of this piece exceed the identification of a long enigmatic character, notwithstanding the importance of the find. In demonstrating the existence of a pool of resources shared between Cambodian and Dravidian cultures, Narayanan reveals a complex process of what could hardly be called Sanskritization, in which the Sanskritic origins of the shared epic heritage take a back seat to its vernacularized expression. Historian Ian Lowman examines the role of Cambodian epigraphy in the making of a political myth defining the relationship between central power and the provincial periphery in the Angkorian period. The myth, which appears to have entered the epigraphic record in the tenth century, is that of the ninth-century “elephant hunter” King Jayavaman III. Tracking the process of the myth’s epigraphic dissemination and identifying the core common to its multiple iterations, Lowman reads in the myth’s long history testimony to the development of the conceptual integration of outlying regions into a unitary, transcendent Cambodian space. Ea Darith’s contribution, on recent excavations at an Angkorian kiln site located at some distance from the central Angkor complex, adds to the growing body of knowledge on ancient Southeast Asian ceramic production, and has its own implications for furthering understandings of Angkor’s complex socio-political frames. Comprising features previously unknown in Angkorian kiln structure and ceramic production technique, the Torp Chey kiln suggests the presence of knowledge exchange networks between China and Angkor, if not necessarily of Chinese artisans at Angkor themselves. Finally, art historian Phillip Green joins a long line of scholars exploring the complex iconography produced under the reign of Mahāyāna Buddhist king Jayavarman VII in the late twelfth – early thirteenth centuries. Green proposes new identifications of two internal pediment scenes at Banteay Chhmar, a sprawling temple situated in Northwest Cambodia which, with improved site access and management, has been the object of increased attention in recent years. In Green’s close formal readings, the pediments in question represent scenes from the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Downplaying the politico-religious innovation often attributed to Jayavarman VII, this identification emphasizes continuity in tradition even as Angkor stretched to new limits on the eve of its political decline.

Due to circumstances beyond our control, the present issue, exceptionally, does not include a contribution written in Khmer.

Ang Choulean and Ashley Thompson

Co-founders and editors