Traditionally, the history of Angkor as we know it from inscriptions and the existing temples begins in the ninth century, when the young king Jayavarman II declared himself the supreme sovereign and established his capital first near present-day Roluos, and a little later in the Kulen Mountains. Up to that point, Khmer history had been that of small independent states occasionally consolidating into larger empires, but never for long. It took a conqueror to establish the beginnings of one of Southeast Asia’s most powerful empires.

The Angkor region, bordering the Great Lake with its valuable supply of water, fish, and fertile soil, has been settled since neolithic times, as is known from stone tools and ceramics found there, and from the identification of circular habitation sites from aerial photographs. For the whole Khmer country, there is more descriptive evidence from the accounts of the Chinese, who began to trade and explore the commercial opportunities of mainland Southeast Asia in the early centuries of the Christian era. The picture is one of small town-states, moated, fortified and frequently in conflict with each other. The Chinese called the principal country with which they traded Funan; it had a strategic importance in controlling the sea routes around the Mekong delta and the Gulf of Thailand. In particular it controlled the narrow Isthmus of Kra – the neck of the Malay Peninsula – which connected eastern Asia with India. Indeed, it was trade with India that gave the Khmers their primary cultural contacts, and introduced them to Hinduism and Buddhism. Khmer religious beliefs, iconography, art and architecture all stemmed directly from India, and this had a profound influence on the development of its civilisation.

The 6th century sees the first historical evidence from local inscriptions. At around this time, the Chinese accounts begin to write of a kingdom called ‘Chenla’ in the interior, but this is a Chinese rather than a Khmer name. In the second half of the century there is a record of a city called Bhavapura, with its king, Bhavavarman I extending his rule from near the present-day site of Kompong Thom to at least as far as Battambang in the west. He was succeeded by his brother, who ruled as Mahendravarman, who in turn was succeeded by his son, Isanavarman I. These three kings progressively conquered the Khmer part of Funan, while the western part was taken by other peoples, in
particular the Mons of the kingdom of Dvaravati to the W of Bangkok. Isanavarman I was responsible for the temple at Sambor Prei Kuk, establishing the first of the pre-Angkorean styles of architecture. Under Isanavarman’s son, Bhavavarman II, who took the throne in 628, the empire disintegrated back into small states, and it took until 654 for Jayavarman I, a grandson of Isanavarman I, from one of these princedoms, to reconquer much of the territory. There is evidence that he ruled from Aninditapura, close to Angkor. On his death, the empire again collapsed, and his successors, including his daughter Jayadevi, the only ancient Khmer queen, controlled only the small kingdom of Aninditapura. The country remained this way until the end of the 8th century, when Jayavarman II became king in 790.

Jayavarman II’s conquests, first of Vyadhapura (SE of Cambodia), then Sambhupura (present-day Sambor), then N as far as Wat Phu, and finally of Aninditapura, established his power. He settled first at Harihalaya, an ancient capital in the region of what is now Roluos, but then, trying to go further NW, experienced an unknown setback which resulted in him relocating to the Kulen Plateau, some 30 km NE of Angkor. Here he pronounced himself ‘world emperor’ in 802, but it was many years before he was strong enough to move his capital back to Harihalaya on the shores of the Great Lake, where he died in 835.

His son Jayavarman III succeeded him on his death. He seems to have built the laterite pyramid of Bakong, which his successor, Indravarman I, had clad in sandstone. The date of his death is unknown, but most probably his successor took the throne with violence. This king remodelled his capital, building in his palace the

Severed heads being shown after one of the battles with the Cham, Bayon, Outer gallery
Cham warships on the Tonle Sap, probably during the last battle sometime before 1181, when they were defeated.

Preah Ko temple, dedicated in 880 and improving Bakong. He also began the baray of Indratataka, which his son Yasovarman I completed after he came to power in 889. This accession was a bloody one, involving a struggle with the crown prince, his brother, and destruction of the palace. Therefore he decided to move his capital to Angkor.

In his ambitious plan, he selected the hill of Bakheng as the center of the new city of Yasodharapura, and as the site of his state temple, first levelling the top. Surrounding the hill, the earth banks of the city limits were 4 km on each side, and traces remain today on the S and W. In addition, Yasovarman built the East Baray, a great reservoir more than 7 km long and almost 2 km wide. Earlier in 893, he had built the Lolei temple in the middle of the Indratataka and the temples of Phnom Krom and Phnom Bok were possible built by him. He died in 910. His two sons, Harshavarman I and Isanavarman II, continued the dynasty, but on the death of the latter, around 928, the capital abruptly moved to Koh Ker, some 100 kilometres to the NE.

The background to this is obscure, but there was a change in the royal succession, and the throne went to Jayavarman IV for at least seven years. He probably owed allegiance to the Angkor kings, and it
is not known how he took the throne. Nevertheless, the scale of the brick temple of Prasat Thom that he had built at Koh Ker shows that he was rich and powerful. Having started a considerable building programme there, he clearly decided to continue and make it his capital. Many smaller temples were added, and a baray, all in the short space of 20 years until the capital reverted to Angkor. The state temple was a seven-storey sandstone pyramid, 35m high.

On his death, Jayavarman IV was succeeded, briefly, by his son Harshavarman II, although an inscription makes it clear that this was not the father’s choice. Moreover, the succession was contested, and after a reign of only three years, Harshavarman met what was probably a violent end. He was succeeded, in 944, by his cousin Rajendravarman, king of the old kingdom of Bhavapura. He had, in fact, helped Harshavarman II in his bid for power and, after the latter’s death, decided to seize power for himself.

Rajendravarman took the capital back to Angkor, but not to the city that Yasovarman had created around the Bakong. Instead, he placed his state temple and palace some kilometres to the E, on the S bank of the great East Baray. Pre Rup (961) was the state temple, and another major construction was the ‘island’ temple of East Mebon (953) in the middle of the baray. These temples were overseen by his chief architect Kavindraramathana, who built for himself Bat Chum and Srah Srang. Other constructions in the same general area include Kutiisvara. At the same time, Rajendravarman strengthened his grip by declaring former ‘kingdoms’ under his rule to be ‘provinces’. He also expanded his empire, reconquering the lands ruled by Yasovarman I, and even sending an expeditionary force to fight the Chams in the coastal areas of what is now central Vietnam. Violent rivalry between the Khmers and the Chams had been continuing for some time.

After Rajendravarman’s death in 968, his son Jayavarman V succeeded to the throne, moving the capital slightly to the W to a more defensible location. Calling it Jayeydranagari, he had a new state temple built at its centre – Ta Keo. At this time, his priest and mentor Yajnavaraha built the exquisite small temple of Banteay Srei, which was dedicated in the last year of Rajendravarman’s life. Jayavarman V’s reign, which lasted three decades, began with armed struggles to quell rebellions, but eventually settled down to be relatively peaceful.

Jayavarman was succeeded by Udayadityavarman I, who ruled for only a few months, after which there was a nine-year war between Jayavarman and Suryavarman I, both pretending to have been consecrated in 1002. The war ended around 1010 with the final victory of Suryavarman I. This king built the Royal Palace at Angkor Thom and, most probably, a new reservoir, the West Baray, measuring 8km x 2km and still in use.

He was succeeded by his son, Udayadityavarman II (1050-1066), who built the Bapuon, a spectacular temple-mountain, and the West Mebon in the middle of the West Baray. His younger brother Harshavarman III (1066-about 1080) was the last of this dynasty; the throne then changed hands to a line of kings who came from the Khorat Plateau in present-day Thailand. After two reigns (Jayavarman VI and Dharanindravarman, both brothers), a grandnephew seized power – Suryavarman II, builder of Angkor Wat and commander of
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>King</th>
<th>Temples begun</th>
<th>Temples rebuilt or added to</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jayavarman II</td>
<td>790-835</td>
<td>Rong Chen on Phnom Kulen, earlier shrine on the site of Kutsivara</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jayavarman III</td>
<td>835-877</td>
<td>Prei Monti, Trapeang Phong, Bakong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indravarman I</td>
<td>877-c.886</td>
<td>Preah Kô, sandstone cladding of Bakong, Indratataka baray</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yasovarman I</td>
<td>889-c.915</td>
<td>Lolei, Bakheng, Prasat Bei, Thom Bay Keek, earlier shrine on the site of Phimeanakas, Phnom Krom, Phnom Bok, East Baray</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harshavarman I</td>
<td>c.915-c.923</td>
<td>Baksjet Chamkrong, Prasat Kravan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isanavarman II</td>
<td>923-c.928</td>
<td>Koh Ker site</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jayavarman IV</td>
<td>c.928-c.941</td>
<td>Pre Rup, East Mebon, Bat Chum, Kutsivara, Banteay Srei, earlier temple on the site of Banteay Kdei, Srah Srang, Baksjet Chamkrong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harshavarman II</td>
<td>c.941-944</td>
<td>Ta Keo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rajendravarman</td>
<td>944-968</td>
<td>North Khleang, continuation of Ta Keo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jayavarman V</td>
<td>968-c.1000</td>
<td>South Khleang, Preah Vihear in the Dangrek Mountains, Phimeanakas and the Royal Palace, Suryaparvata at Phnom Chisor, Preah Khan at Kompong Svay, West Baray, Wat Phu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Udayadityavarman I</td>
<td>1001-1002</td>
<td>Bapuon, West Mebon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jayaviravarman</td>
<td>1002-1010</td>
<td>North Khleang, continuation of Ta Keo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suryavarman I</td>
<td>1002-1049</td>
<td>Phimai in present-day Thailand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Udayadityavarman II</td>
<td>1050-1066</td>
<td>Angkor Wat, Thommanon, Chao Say Tevoda, Banteay Samrê, Phnom Rung in present-day Thailand, Beng Mealea, Beng Mealea, Chao Say Tevoda, Banteay Samrê, Bakong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harshavarman III</td>
<td>10667-1080</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jayavarman VI</td>
<td>1080-c.1107</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dharanindravarman I</td>
<td>1107-1112</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suryavarman II</td>
<td>1113-c.1150</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yasovarman II</td>
<td>c.1150-1165</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tribhuvanadityavarman</td>
<td>c.1165-1177</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jayavarman VII</td>
<td>1181-c.1220</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indravarman II</td>
<td>c.1220-1243</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jayavarman VIII</td>
<td>c.1243-1295</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Srindravarman</td>
<td>1295-1307</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Srindrajayavarman</td>
<td>1307-1327</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jayavarman Paramesvara</td>
<td>1327-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
many military campaigns to expand the empire. His rule, from 1112 to about 1150, marks the peak of Angkor's power and influence. Thereafter, there were increasing revolts in the provinces. There were both alliances and conflicts between some Khmer and Cham princes, rendering the political situation very confused. In 1165 the throne was taken by a usurper, Tribhuvanadityavarman, who was killed 12 years later when a Cham and Khmer group mounted a surprise naval attack from the Great Lake and took Angkor.

This might have been the end of the city, had it not been for the return of a prince, later crowned as Jayavarman VII. After four years of fighting, he succeeded in driving out the Chams, beginning his reign in 1181 as the last great king of Angkor. A fervent Buddhist, unlike his predecessors who worshipped Hindu gods, Jayavarman VII crammed into his 30-year rule the largest building programme ever undertaken. His new city is the surviving Angkor Thom, centred on the Bayon. He was also responsible for Ta Prohm, Banteay Kdei and Preah Khan, among others, not to mention hundreds of temples, hospitals and other buildings across the empire.

This hurried, almost frenzied, building activity is generally considered as the last; but it is difficult to evaluate the part played by Indravarman II in the programme. Moreover, Jayavarman VIII, responsible for the destruction of so much Buddhist imagery, tried to restore and improve some important Hindu temples — Angkor Wat, Bapuon and the central plaza of Angkor Thom. Nothing else has survived at Angkor from later than the early 13th century, partly of course because many of the structures were perishable. After the rise of Theravada Buddhism only wooden temples were made and thus it is difficult to evaluate the wealth of Angkor at this time. The empire continued to prosper — a Chinese emissary, Zhou Daguan, left an intriguing account of the city and its riches in the years 1296-7. After this time, there was increased fighting with the newly-emerged Siamese kingdom. However, other factors may have been more important in its decline. One was the importance of trade for which Phnom Penh and Ayutthaya, the capital of the Siamese state, were much better suited. In the fifteenth century, new rulers emerged on the Mekong River, where modern Phnom Penh now stands. Nevertheless, the kingdom at Angkor endured until the end of the sixteenth century.
**Khmer Temples**

The main evidence for Khmer architecture, and ultimately for Khmer civilisation, however, remains the religious buildings, considerable in number and extremely varied in size. They were destined for the immortal gods, and as they were built of the durable materials of brick, laterite and sandstone, many have survived to the present day. They were usually surrounded by enclosures to protect them from evil powers, but confusion has often arisen as to which is a temple enclosure and which is that of the town of which the temple was a part.

**Characteristics of Khmer architecture**

To gain a proper understanding of what a Khmer temple was, it should first be recalled that it was not a meeting place for the faithful but the palace of a god, who was enshrined there to allow him to bestow his beneficence, in particular on the founder and his familiairs. There was thus the need to build the finest possible residence for him, to be sure, although as he was there in the form of a statue there was little need for a large space. One of the largest is the central shrine of Angkor Wat and its cella has internal dimensions of 4.6 metres by 4.7; the pedestal of the statue being approximately the width of the door, would have been 1.6 metres square. So a great temple would not be a vast palace for a single god but a grouping of multiple shrines with a main divinity at the centre. Preah Khan temple, for example, was originally conceived to house more than 400 deities, and many others were to be added subsequently. The shrines could be linked or surrounded by galleries, which usually had doors and themselves housed certain divinities. In any case they were in no way intended to provide passage for great processions as has too often been asserted;
such processions would have been greatly impeded, or
rendered impossible by the doors and their disproportional
tely large thresholds. Some are not even accessible on foot, for
example Ta Keo where it seems there was not even provision
for doorways. As the residence of a god, or gods, the sacred
territory in which the temple is sited is an image of the
universe, where the gods sit on Mount Meru, the centre of the
world, surrounded by the primordial ocean. This is the image
which the sacred compound of a state temple in the Khmer
country offers us, in which the prasat, the sanctuary tower,
usually represents Mount Meru and can be flanked by four
further prasats; the various enclosures being the mountains
surrounding it, and the most being the ocean.

This world image was to impose a rigorous order of
construction on Khmer architecture, from the simplest buildings to the
most complex monumental groups. The characteristic applies of
course to the temple as originally conceived. In reality, as might be
expected as long as a temple remained an active place of worship, the
Khmers added smaller or greater numbers of extra shrines to the
original coherent group – especially from the reign of Jayavarman VII
onwards. This is particularly evident at Preah Khan, and the practice
can result in an impression of chaos to the modern eye. It is not too
difficult, however, to ascertain the original layout.

From Sambor Prei Kuk at the beginning of the seventh century to
Angkor Wat in the twelfth century, the temples are designed in
enclosures of quadrangular shape which centre on the main shrine, or
on the central group of shrines, and are laid out according to a precise
method. Geometrical rules, which probably varied according to the
type of shrine, determine the siting and dimensions of each subsidiary
group in relation to the centre of the temple and its sanctuary. But in
the absence of written documents, there is no alternative but to retrace
the original design a posteriori.

The order is marked too by the hierarchy of the elements of the
overall plan. The central prasat is dominant, at least through its height,
although not always its overall area, and the other elements are
distributed around it according to their size and volume, so as to grant

The sandstone temple-mountain of
Ta Keo

Sanctuary (with central tower in the
style of Angkor Wat) connected to an
antarala and mandapa, Banteay Samré
its full significance as the exact centre of the temple. The primacy of the central shrine is also emphasised by its elevation on a terrace of variable height, or in the case of the state temples, on a stepped pyramid. Hierarchical considerations also dictated the type and positioning of the decorative work. It is more profuse and richer on the central shrine which it sometimes covers entirely, and diminishes progressively in scope as it recedes from the centre. The most obvious example is Banteay Srei, where the three main shrines are richly decorated over their whole surface, with dvārapāla carved on the central tower and devata on the north and south towers, whilst the preceding hall, linked by a screen or newel, is adorned with a patchwork of small squares in alternate patterns. The ‘libraries’ feature fine decoration on their main E and W faces, and have pediments which count among the most beautiful in Khmer art, but their sides are undecorated. The decoration becomes less profuse as it reaches the gate-lodges and ancillary buildings, up to the entry pavilion to the so-called fourth enclosure. An alternative explanation might be possible, namely that the original intention was to cover the whole temple with decorative carvings, beginning traditionally with the central shrine, and moving progressively outwards. Counter-examples would however be easy to adduce, and the reality is that, for one reason or another, not a single Khmer temple was actually ‘completed’.

There are other conventions governing the design of Khmer monuments. In the case of the sanctuary towers, the superstructure features several storeys progressively reducing in height, superposed on the central mass, and representing the successive concentric levels of Mount Meru, the abode of the gods. In the ‘temple mountain’ design,
however, the pyramid is itself an image of Mount Meru, through the ascending concentric universes of its superstructure, echoing those of the sanctuary towers. The elements which form the towers and the levels of the pyramid diminish progressively in size, producing the effect of “vertical soaring: a genuine optical illusion, a trick of perspective, which enhances the actual height”.

These steadily diminishing proportions are also present in the miniature buildings nesting in the corners of each scaled-down level of the pyramid, like elements of an acroterium. An outstanding example, illustrating reduction in both scale and imagery can be seen in the northern group of monuments at Sambor Prei Kuk. On the east side of the central shrine's south face, there is a ‘flying palace’ - a kind of picture of a facade sculpted in brick. Every detail is present: the frame, the colonnettes, the lintel with its makaras, the pilasters and the pediment. The sculpted panel is about two metres high. At the top of this carved picture, in the tympanum of the pediment, is a miniature of the same ‘flying palace’, also sculpted in brick. The temple thus ‘decorates itself’ in its own likeness.

The inscriptions often mention the date, and sometimes the precise moment, at which a statue was ‘brought to life’ (the text speaks of ‘opening a statue’s eyes’), which was the crucial instant in the life of the temple. There was no solemn ceremony for the inauguration of a temple on its completion (which would have been difficult to determine exactly), nor one for laying the first stone. We know, however, that the Indian Shastras which laid down the rules of architecture, emphasised the extreme importance of the initial ceremonies for a building, and this is well attested by the presence of various ‘foundation offerings’ deposited beneath the actual foundations of the shrine, and also beneath the pedestals of the statues (which is why they have all been overturned by thieves), or even at the summit of the towers. The offerings were deposited in a square flagstone with various cavities, some of which were marked by letters and covered with a lid. In these cavities, precious stones, thin gold leaves, or even strands of hair or nail-clippings from the donor’s body, were placed.

One final point is that the deity was not always a statue at the centre of the shrine, especially in the case of Siva who, as supreme god, was most often represented by the linga, or phallus. Inserted in its pedestal, the linga in Khmer sculpture comprises three sections, and is a symbol of the Brahman trinity. Only the cylindrical top third was visible, sometimes ending in an ovoid shape, and representing Siva. The middle section was octagonal and represented Vishnu, while the bottom third was square and symbolised Brahma. Both were hidden within the pedestal. As with the statues in the round, the pedestal was surmounted by a square stone slab with a central hole and a spout to allow the lustral water to run off and be collected by the faithful. When a linga is the central feature, this slab is called a yoni, a ‘womb’, which is a symbol of fertility and, by extension, prosperity.
All the visible buildings at Angkor are religious monuments; the only remains of any royal dwellings in the Royal Palace are a few scattered tiles and the foundations of some wooden constructions. However, the Elephant Terrace was the base of the royal reception hall and the Leper King Terrace the base of another unknown royal building. The lower parts of big wooden columns from the 10th century have been recently discovered in the Royal Palace area, leading to the hope of further discoveries. Of ordinary Khmer houses of the period, no trace remains, and yet there is ample evidence of cities and towns in the layout of the larger temples. You need only look to your left and right as you walk along the main causeway of Angkor Wat to see the traces of city streets on a grid pattern. Again, driving through the South Gate of Angkor Thom on the way to the Bayon, the forest on either side was a living city.

The record of daily life at Angkor available to us is very limited. The inscriptions were largely concerned with matters of religion and state, and yet there are some important inventories that give some idea of local produce and populations. That not all the land belonged to the king is obvious from the mention of donations of rice fields to temples, and if there were large landowners capable of making such donations, there may well have been small holdings as well. Moreover, the ‘slaves’ listed in temple records could not have been real slaves in the modern meaning of the word, for the simple reason that slaves could not defile the sacred precincts, let alone be named in religious inscriptions. They

"They also keep beside them a bowl of tin or earthenware filled with water for rinsing their hands, since only their fingers are used in eating rice, which is sticky and could not be got rid of without this water."

"In Cambodia it is the women who take charge of trade … Market is held every day from six o’clock until noon. There are no shops in which merchants live; instead, they display goods on a matting spread upon the ground."
were more likely to have been ‘slaves of god’. There were, however, certainly real slaves, as described in the text mentioned below: “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.”

Perhaps the clearest mirror that we have of daily life in those distant times is the celebrated account of the Chinese emissary Zhou Daguan (Chou Ta-Kuan), who lived at Angkor for a year from 1296 to 1297. The Chinese had a strong commercial interest in knowing the customs of far-away countries, and Zhou Daguan was particularly diligent in describing this exotic society. He wrote his Notes on the Customs of Cambodia after his return to China, sometime before 1312.

To this account we can add the demotic bas-reliefs carved on the outer gallery walls of the Bayon at the turn of the 13th century. This was the one occasion on which the stone-carvers turned from mythological and historical themes to everyday occurrences. The combined impression from these bas-reliefs and Zhou Daguan’s account is that many of the mundane aspects of Khmer life have remained similar almost to the present day, particularly in the countryside, where houses, markets, ox-carts and so on are almost identical to those carved in sandstone eight centuries ago. If there is any caution to be exercised here, it is in remembering that these few records afford just a glimpse of a society, not its totality. The images on these pages come from the Bayon, the quotes from Zhou Daguan.

“Generally speaking, the women, like the men, wear only a strip of cloth, bound round the waist, showing bare breasts of milky whiteness.” Clearly, Zhou Daguan would be referring to the breasts of upper class women, as the skin of Khmer women living in the villages and working in the fields would have had much darker.

“The wearing of fabrics patterned with recurring groups of flowers is permitted to high officers and princes.”
INSCRIPTIONS

The inscriptions that the visitor can see in the temples are those carved on the door jambs of the entrances to the sanctuaries. Inscriptions were also carved on steles, but the majority of these are now housed in the Conservancy at Angkor to prevent them from being stolen. As documents they are of great historical importance, representing the sole archives on the ancient Khmer. While there were undoubtedly palm leaf manuscripts, all of them have disappeared.

More than 1,200 inscriptions have been discovered, but it is likely that many more have disappeared, or have not yet been found. The texts vary a great deal in length from as little as one line, to several hundreds. With some very rare exceptions, all related to the Hindu or Buddhist temples in which they were carved. Indeed, there are virtually no non-religious inscriptions and it would seem that shrines to local divinities, which moreover were constructed in perishable materials, never had inscriptions.

The script evolved over the centuries up to the Angkorian period. On the earliest inscriptions, dating to the 5th century, it is very close to that known as Pallava from Southern India, although an exact equivalent has not been found. However an individual style soon developed. By the beginning of the Angkorian period, the script had become typically Khmer and was often very meticulous in its execution. During the reign of King Rajendravarman a stencil was clearly used for royal inscriptions. After this time, the style changed very little, although, of course, not all carvers wrote in the same way. Then during the reign of King Jayavarman VII, the script took on its characteristic, rather squared appearance. From then the script continued to evolve into that which is used today.

The texts were written in Sanskrit or Khmer, in more or less equal quantities, but their content was very different depending on the language used. The Sanskrit texts are poems addressed to the Hindu gods or the Buddha and had a more or less standard format: one or several verses of invocation to the deity of the temple would be followed by an eulogy on the founder of the temple, whether the king or an important dignitary. The eulogy was frequently formulaic, but nevertheless interesting details on the lives of the kings can be gleaned. The date of the installation of the principal divinity can usually be found, a date all too often confused with the actual building of the temple which would have begun before and frequently continued.
are those carved Inscriptions now housed in being stolen. As presumably the undoubtedly but it is likely found. The e, to several with some very ns, all related to Buddhist niches they were d, there are on-religious d it would seem local divinities, yet were perishable er had evolved over the Vedic period. On the cessions, dating to y, it is very known as not having J. By the ne typically during the for royal although, ofng the reign of ; rather to evolve into less equal g on the the Hindu nat: one or did be ther the king maleic, but z be gleaned. usually be ng of the continued subsequently). Certain other dates may also be included such as when the king ascended the throne. The quality of the Sanscrit is extremely good, and sometimes of such finesse as to suggest an Indian author. Although the steles are frequently referred to as 'foundation steles', they seem to have been carved on the death of the person celebrated thereon and often many years after the foundation of the temple.

Khmer inscriptions were written in prose and are generally more like an inventory — listing the goods belonging to the gods, such as their land, animals or cult objects. Occasionally, we find long lists of the servants of the temple or the rice farmers working for the gods. These have often been referred to as slaves, but being listed in such a fashion, is more like appearing on a 'roll of honour'.

The difference in character between the two languages can be appreciated in the rare inscriptions incorrectly referred to as bilingual. Here the same facts are recounted in both languages but with a very different slant. While the sanscrit lists the gifts made to the gods by the founder, the Khmer emphasizes that the founder's family maintains the right to dispose of these gifts.

Some rare exceptions have been found among Khmer inscriptions such as that known as 'the oath of the servants of Suryavarman I' found on the door jambs of the gopura to the royal palace of Angkor Thom. After the oath formula, there follows a list of those who have pledged their allegiance to the king. There is evidence of some names being scratched out, suggesting that the loyalty of some oath-takers was short lived. One or perhaps two texts also contain short extracts of 'royal annals'. Such enticing glimpses as these afford, make even more regrettable the loss of palm-leaf manuscripts and other literary works.

The inscriptions allow us to some extent to trace the ancient history and civilisation of the Khmer. However, we must bear in mind the context in which they were carved and not expect information that is very comprehensive. Similarly, we should not draw conclusions from lack of evidence. A paucity of information does not necessarily imply that such and such and such an event or custom did not exist, nor that such and such a king was unimportant.